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# Fostering culturally responsive teaching in an urban preschool: a qualitative case study

Denise Jones

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**FOSTERING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN AN URBAN  
PRESCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY**

by  
Denise T. Jones

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
July 16, 2013

Dissertation Chair: Susan Browne, Ed.D.

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## **Dedication**

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” Psalm 1:3.

The completion of this dissertation and creativity in this document were inspired by the Holy Spirit. God, I thank you for guiding and helping me persevere through this process, even during my season of loss. God, without you I can do nothing. I am eternally grateful in how you use me daily to demonstrate your wonderful gifts.

This work of art is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Nettie Jones, who led the way for achieving greatness and crafted an unusual work ethic in me. Thank you for the legacy you left with me.

My accomplishments are dedicated to the memory of my father, David Pewu, my brothers, Curtis and Craig Jones.

This season of success is dedicated to the memory of my Aunt, Jean Brown, who allowed me the space to talk, cry, and laugh my way through the storm. Thank you for the word of God and love you poured in me during your season here on earth.

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To my dissertation committee members, Dr. Susan Browne, Dr. Monica Kerrigan, and Dr. Patrick Westcott, for their commitment, time, and seeing my dissertation to its completion. Thank you for encouraging me to explore and examine more.

I would like to thank my building principal for allowing me to evolve into a leader during the dissertation process. I am grateful for my colleagues, for their dedication and participation in helping to foster culturally responsive pedagogy among students.

## **Abstract**

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FOSTERING CULTURALLY REPSONSIVE TEACHING IN AN URBAN  
PRESCHOOL: A QUALIATIVE CASE STUDY  
2012/2013  
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Preschool years are significantly important for students in urban districts. Early childhood helps set the foundation for learning about school culture. Students who are able to connect their home environment to the school environment tend to do better in their academic setting. Fostering a pedagogy that is culturally sensitive to students is a teaching stance that enables success with curriculum and addresses the inequities that accompany low socioeconomic students.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore four urban teachers' formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy within an urban preschool. The teachers' espoused and enacted practice formulated the content of professional development workshops to help transform their current pedagogy.

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## Chapter 1

During my tenure as a teacher, I have spent a significant amount of time working in urban classrooms. The urban classroom holds a significant place in my heart as I seek to build and encourage students who face unique challenges because of their race, culture, and social class. A student's culture, traditions, and beliefs help construct meaning as well as define social interactions among other individuals (King, 1994). Culture is an identifier of family, belonging, and self-worth. Banks (1997) describes culture as a set of certain behaviors, symbolic identifiers, values, and other elements that distinguish one ethnic group from another. When I use the word culture in this study I am referring to values, behavior styles, dialect, nonverbal communication and perspectives (Banks, 1999). I define culturally responsive pedagogy as using teaching approaches that include students' culture that display positive relationships, a culturally centered environment, while implementing the district's curriculum. Establishing positive relationships between teacher and student within a school environment that incorporates a student's culture is equivalent to mirroring the values and beliefs of a student's family (Willis, 1995). As work continues to improve teaching and learning in urban contexts, there is a need to explore how race and social class affect the pedagogy of urban teachers. Therefore, acknowledging cultural responsive pedagogy is an intricate part of this exploration.

A decade has passed since the No Child Left Behind Act, (NCLB, 2001), that declared that race and class had a significant impact on student achievement (Nisbett, 2011). The federal government enacted a policy intended to close the achievement gap

and ensure that all students regardless of ethnic and cultural background, disability or social class would receive quality education. Despite the NCLB act and its attempt to address the achievement gap, there are still concerns with pedagogy, particularly within urban school districts (Gay, 2007). The school in this study, as well as other schools in Empire City school district, is underserved and mirrors other urban schools in the United States where African American students and their social class are factors impacting academic achievement.

Among the volumes of historical evidence surrounding the disparity in education among African American students, it is best verified with the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896. This case involved Homer Plessy who tested the “Whites Only” law for riding train cars. Plessy argued that since he was racially mixed with European and African American heritage he had the right to sit in the “White section” of the train. Despite his claim, Plessy was later found guilty. The law during this time declared that separate facilities were indeed constitutional. The separate but equal law included movie theaters, eating establishments, bathrooms, and public education. However, the revolution of challenging public education gained public attention with *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Topeka Kansas, 1954 (Jones & Hancock, 2005). The case of *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the previously decisions of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The history of legalizing segregation of schools and NCLB’s inability to address pedagogy are contributing factors to the low academic success of low socioeconomic status students. The racial disparity from prior court cases and NCLB, 2001, over time has impacted academic success of low socioeconomic status students. The concept of equitable schools was the result of *Brown v. Board of Education*. This court case focused

on the abolishment of segregation of African American children. Although the physical space and learning materials may have been equal, segregation of White and Black students was a direct violation of equal protection. NCLB, 2001, focused on holding schools accountable for student achievement particularly in urban school districts. This act failed to uphold equal protection of students by not holding schools accountable for student achievement particularly in urban schools. However, neither of these laws addressed reforming pedagogy or delivery of instruction in education.

A part of reforming public schools should begin with an examination of the years of disparity African American students have faced, particularly within urban classrooms. Reforming delivery of instruction in urban classrooms is one of the steps for creating learning experiences that are similar to students within suburban districts that impact the success of student achievement (Laster, Wright, & Young, 2005). Laster et al.'s (2005) study uses various researchers to substantiate my argument and stance for implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in an early childhood classroom. Researchers assert that student achievement would improve if classroom instruction included students' home cultures (Banks, 1999; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hollins, 1993; King, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Nieto, 1999). The students within urban schools are often taught by teachers whose social class and culture differ from their students (NCES, 2010). According to Gay, (2002) teachers are insufficiently prepared to teach diverse populations of students, and teachers have difficulty instructing students who originate from different cultural backgrounds (Howard, 1999). More often, these teachers overlook or lack strategies for culturally responsive teaching techniques geared towards the needs of their students.

New understandings of the importance of early childhood experiences in cognitive and non-cognitive development have emerged in recent years. For instance, previous research completed by Grissmer and Eiseman (2008) found that social class contributed to the disadvantages of students' development during their early childhood stage and impacted their readiness skills prior to beginning kindergarten. Researchers, such as Grissmer and Eiseman (2008), offer knowledge to help establish frameworks to examine the impact of early childhood experiences and how they relate to student achievement. A study that looked at the early childhood experiences and school readiness of young students from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds revealed that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who were exposed to early childhood learning experienced higher test scores in achievement, diminished special need services and a decreased percentage of retention among primary grades (NCES, 2007). The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy is important for impacting student achievement within the classroom (Ware, 2006). Grissmer and Eiseman (2008) specified through their research that early childhood experiences were primary for impacting student achievement. The research asserted that much of the achievement gap of students materialized before first grade.

The implementation of early childhood programs is beneficial for students who come from low socioeconomic status (SES) communities. Georgia, the first state to offer universal pre-kindergarten, authorized a longitudinal study in 1996 included 3,042 children in a Pre-Kindergarten program through their entire attendance of school. The result of this study was that students who attended Pre-Kindergarten did better than students who had not attended. The main goal for providing quality early childhood

programs to students is to help eliminate the achievement gap between low socioeconomic students and their more affluent peers (Dunne, 2010). The implications are that the experiences of low SES students who attended early childhood settings performed much better throughout school than those who had not attended early childhood.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Urban Schools**

Implementing culturally responsive teaching in urban schools, particularly in an early childhood setting, is just one course of action to support school reform. I will utilize inquiry as a stance to explore the ways in which teachers at Daniel Preschool utilize African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), inquiry as a stance is framed around problems and contexts of practice and the best ways it can be used to enhance student learning.

Although this research will explore teachers' formal understanding regarding integrating culturally responsive teaching within an urban school, another focus is to foster culturally responsive teaching practices. In addition, the study utilized inquiry as a stance to explore teacher strategies, diversity and evidence of cultural responsive pedagogy within the participant's classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching is defined as both "relational" and "technical" approaches. This approach to fostering culturally responsive pedagogy includes utilizing a model that focuses on: 1) the whole child approach of the student (Greenwood, 1997; Greenwood, Delquadri, & Carta, 1988); 2) a strong philosophy that supports student success (Delpit, 2006); 3) delivery of instruction anchored around state content standards (Kendall & Marzano, 2004); 4) teachers committed to including a student's culture within their pedagogy (Banks, 1999;

Hollins, 2008); and, 5) detailed classroom objectives to facilitate learning (Love, 2009; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009).

Public schools within the United States have become increasingly diverse including African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders, and American Indians who all represent 25 percent of the U.S. population. By the year 2050 these ethnic groups will have increased to 47 percent within the United States (O'Hare, 1992). This increased number of ethnic groups can also impact the delivery of education in public schools. One of the difficulties that impact the educational success of minority students is the difference of cultural and ethnic backgrounds between student and teacher (Gay, 2010, Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Murphy & Alexander, 2006). There is a need to reform teachers' current pedagogical practices that do not reflect the culture and ethnic backgrounds of the student population. Although, the NCLB Act seeks to give students in grades 3-8 an annual assessment in reading and math, it does not include requirements of culturally competent teaching strategies nor discuss preparing candidates of teacher preparation programs for diverse populations (Ardila-Rey, 2008). NCLB does not focus completely on the entire child but on the implementation of a progressive law that continues to promote inequality among urban students. Despite the attempts of NCLB at establishing equitable education for students in urban districts, there are major flaws with the act that demonstrate little sensitivity to a student's culture and pedagogical stances that directly impact urban schools. It is almost impossible to address cultural diversity topics when the focus of NCLB is on raising test scores (Leonardo, 2007). Therefore, the reality of NCLB is that it continues to facilitate disparities among students from different social classes, students with disabilities, and English language learners by focusing more on teachers

preparing students for taking standardized tests rather than focusing on implementing a student's culture for a more rounded education and shortening the achievement gap through fostering responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2007). The NCLB was designed to make education fair for all students, but because it does not address using culturally responsive approaches to increase positive and meaningful learning experiences, it unknowingly perpetuates the racial disparity among students particularly within urban school districts. This examination of racial disparity utilizes several scholars to inform the research, identify, analyze, and reform ineffective teaching in urban classrooms (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2007; Hollins, 1993; Pai & Adler, 2001; Rogoff, 2003; Shade, 1997)..

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are two main points of the statement of the problem. An internal scan along with informal observations of the teachers demonstrated frustration with their African American students. It was common to see the same African American students standing inside the school's front booth with the security guard. I often inquired to the security guard the purpose for the student standing at the front booth. The response given by the security guard was typically the same reason, "He/she constantly talks in class and just won't listen to the teacher" (Officer Mims, personal communication, November 20, 2010).

The scan of the school detected that the staff at Daniel Preschool, according to Dezieck (2003), fit into Janssen's Four Room Apartment Model. This model includes four categories, such as contentment, renewal, denial, or confusion. A large number of the internal stakeholders were identified under the contentment part of Janssen's model.

While the research on culturally responsive pedagogy has made significant contributions to education, relatively little is known about the ways in which culturally responsive pedagogy in an early childhood setting can be broadened, improved, or bring about change to enhance teacher-student relationships within urban public schools. Based on the results generated from the informal scan of Daniel Preschool, there is a need to explore the early childhood classroom environment and the relationship between teacher and student. Current evidence about implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies within an early childhood setting through a qualitative study of both African American and Caucasian teachers is minimal (Ware, 2006). As a result, there is a lack of knowledge on how to conduct a qualitative case study within an early childhood classroom such as Daniel Preschool that explores the ways in which teachers transform their current pedagogy (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). According to Lee (1998), most research and assessment of culturally responsive teaching strategies is mainly facilitated and conducted by White researchers located within universities. As a result, research conducted by primarily White researchers that examine the impact of teachers within an urban school can demonstrate unintentionally biased results that do not promote constructive findings or positive approaches to research (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Research on culturally responsive strategies in an urban Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten school requires an examination of the pedagogical practices of those teachers and implementation of suggested classroom techniques to help enhance culturally responsive teaching.

I explored how educators viewed and implemented culturally responsive pedagogy into their instructional practices through the use of qualitative case study

research. Within this qualitative case study, I sought to transform school climate through action research by implementing culturally responsive teaching approaches using professional development workshops to help support positive teacher-student relationships and student achievement for four middle class female teachers who teach Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten in a predominately African American school environment. According to Banks (1999, 2002), there is evidence of better ways to evaluate and improve academic performance among students who emanate from different cultural backgrounds such as reforming the current curriculum and incorporating teaching strategies that values diversity.

There are two significant factors that impact student achievement: classroom environment and implementing a student's culture into instruction. Classroom environment is a major factor impeding the effectiveness of instruction and student achievement if clear expectations of classroom rules are not communicated to students prior to the start of school. In addition, African American students are better able to achieve academic success when their instructional environment and classroom expectations include positive teacher-student relationships that utilize elements of "Afro-cultural ethos" and a culturally responsive classroom (Lee, 1998). "Afro-cultural ethos" is a group of techniques incorporated into the student's learning environment that help establish a foundation for academic achievement and classroom rules (Lee, 1998). Therefore, incorporating classroom management is interconnected to culturally responsive teaching because the style of management can enhance or deter the success of equal education (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). A culturally centered classroom addresses and promotes academic and social achievement, establishing rules

for expected behavior, facilitating continuous communication with students, keeping families informed regarding student progress, and using culturally sensitive techniques for dealing with behavior problems (Weinstein et al., 2003). Furthermore, in order to facilitate change, the participants must focus on cultivating a positive learning environment that includes their students' culture to improve the effectiveness of education within Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten urban classrooms. As the principal investigator of the study, I explored how utilizing culturally responsive teaching impacted students and their academic learning environment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative action research was to identify the lack of culturally responsive teaching practices and then improve the pedagogical practices of four early childhood teachers regarding the population of students they serve and understand how they connect daily instruction to students' culture and ethnic background. By exploring and addressing the teachers' beliefs and pedagogical stance, my goal was to enhance their formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy by establishing a more culturally responsive environment for diverse populations of students primarily within early childhood programs (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Likewise, I wanted to utilize inquiry to examine how teachers approach students' culture/experience in their teaching techniques as well as into the classrooms. The change needed within Daniel Preschool served as a site of research that focused on reforming the learning environment of diverse populations through encouraging participants to take a stance on fostering culturally responsive teaching. Currently, the Pre-Kindergarten classrooms utilize The Creative Curriculum to help educators establish developmentally appropriate lessons.

This particular curriculum allows for teachers to implement rich learning experiences through theme-based lessons that are relevant to each student but not their culture (The Creative Curriculum Website, 2011). The kindergarten curriculum is composed of the Common Core State Standards guide that focuses on: 1) aligned standards with college and work experience, 2) rigorous content through use of higher order thinking, 3) formulated strengths of states standards, 4) evidenced based research, consistent goals, and 4) informed evidence that prepares students to succeed. The plan for reform reflected a modification to the district's established guide for accomplishing the curriculum for early childhood. The main goal of Creative Curriculum and the established kindergarten curriculum is to increase literacy but not necessarily incorporate the students' culture. Therefore, the foundation of this study involved interconnecting the district curriculum and students' culture. As classrooms become more diverse, I believe that the practices of teacher management skills, methods of demonstrating respect of differences, and instructional tools for impacting student achievement must also change to accommodate education. In addition, the research sought to thoroughly explore the role culture plays in instructional practices in the classrooms at Daniel Preschool.

While the study sought to first explore teachers' current pedagogical practices, I also looked at reform and implementing best practices for culturally diverse students. I engaged the participants in informal conversations regarding fostering culturally responsive pedagogy prior to beginning the study to ensure appropriateness. In order to help transform teachers' instructional practices, the study needed appropriate participants that demonstrated two qualifying factors. Teachers with less than three years of experience at this school were seen as having a higher probability of accepting change

and that were not currently enrolled in a graduate program. Data collected from the study were analyzed to understand how teachers established their pedagogical stance.

### **Research Questions**

The understanding and utilization of culture by urban classroom teachers has the potential to impact a student's early childhood learning environment (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Based on the informal data that I collected in the classrooms the following overarching question and accompanying questions guide this study:

1. What role does culture play in teaching in urban classrooms for the teachers at Daniel Preschool?
2. How do teachers at Daniel Preschool feel about integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment within an urban preschool classroom?
3. What are early childhood teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching in an urban school classroom?
4. How do the teachers draw upon African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching?
5. In what ways are teachers at Daniel Preschool transforming their cultural pedagogy?

These questions helped explore teacher pedagogies in four different classrooms at Daniel Preschool. In addition, the research questions also helped me ensure that the students' culture was implemented within the classroom instruction.

### **Importance of the Study**

There are a number of challenges that educators face including culture and educational inequality. The current evidence of the achievement gap overlooks culture as

a main ingredient for improvement in student achievement (Madhere, 1998). My experiences as a student attending public school in an urban district demonstrated that a student's culture is often overlooked. As an elementary school student, I, as well as other minority students, was perceived by certain teachers as boisterous, rude, and mouthy. This is an unfortunate common misconception currently perpetuated today. I came from a single parent home with much older male siblings, I enjoyed going to school. My mom worked several jobs and therefore I was a "latch key" kid. Earlier on, this level of independence made me extremely conscious of my environment and my racial identity. However, school was cathartic and I embraced it. I had a thirst for knowledge and I constantly wanted to learn more about a variety of subjects. My desire was to be the best student, but my enthusiasm and participation in classroom discussions was interpreted by my teachers as too talkative and a source of disruption to their lessons. I had a mixture of male and female teachers, from different ethnic and social class backgrounds, but often I felt like I was an intrusion into their space with my inquisitiveness. The earlier part of my education was spent at Dewey Lock Elementary School, where most of the teachers were from middle class environments and various ethnic backgrounds while the students were predominately low socio-economic status African Americans. I spent most of my time in class absorbing every word spoken by the teacher as well as new concepts taught in class. It was not until my attendance in Mr. Baxter's third grade class that I became socially aware of my socioeconomic status.

My third grade teacher, Mr. Baxter was a young, neatly dressed African American teacher who lived in the outskirts of the city and firmly believed that excessive talking was rude and inappropriate for the classroom. Mr. Baxter gave me a low score in conduct

on my report card because he stated that I talked entirely too much for a third-grader. I began asking Mr. Baxter questions regarding the math homework and after the second question Mr. Baxter raised his palm at me, which meant stop talking. “But I don’t understand.” Mr. Baxter raised his palm at me again and this time I took a deep breath and put my head down on the table. At the end of the day, this is when students were required to copy math homework assignments from the board. I somehow believed that this would be an excellent time to revisit my question. I hesitantly raised my hand until he recognized my hand. “Yes, Denise, what is it?” “Mr. Baxter, can you tell me how to do this math problem?” Mr. Baxter glared at me, “I thought we were finished with your questions.” I quickly inserted, “But I don’t understand how to get the answers.” Mr. Baxter walked half way to my desk, “Do I need to call your mother?” “No,” I answered, somewhat puzzled. Did my behavior warrant a phone call to my mother? Talking was part of the culture within my home environment as well as school. Talking was how I made sense of my learning while connecting it to my background and culture. During this time third graders were very talkative and my observations of students today lend the same actions. Soon after that incident I received my first bad grade in math and conduct. Grades in conduct were the teacher’s way of communicating behavior problems to parents on the school report cards. It was during this time that I began to notice that other students who asked similar questions to this teacher were also given low grades in conduct. After several reprimands from my mother, I learned how to refrain from asking questions even when I was unclear about a lesson. My grades in Mr. Baxter’s class remained mediocre, particularly in math. A theme evolved in my mind regarding no question asking for clarification of assignments, which left a trail of disappointment with

teachers such as Ms. Darby, Mr. Sheppard, Mr. Lark, and Ms. Vaughn, who appeared in each subsequent school. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2009a), describes an example of how a teacher helps the students make sense of their learning by allowing them to talk and ask questions in a culturally relevant math class in her book *The Dream-Keepers*. Rossi moved around the classroom as students posed questions and suggested solutions. She often asked, “How do you know?” to push the students’ thinking. When students asked questions, the teacher was quick to say, “Who knows. Who can help him out here?” By recycling the questions (and consequently, the knowledge), Ms. Rossi helped her students understand that they were knowledgeable and capable of answering their own questions and those of others. However, Ms. Rossi did not shrink from her own responsibility as a teacher. From time to time she worked individually with students who seemed puzzled or confused.

These teachers all shared the same middle class status, but also lacked culturally responsive techniques for interacting with their students. Thereafter, my silence impacted my grades. Mr. Baxter had the capacity to address the change in my classroom participation as well as the drastic changes in my grades. Clearly, I was discouraged and he ignored the opportunity to encourage me. By middle school and high school I had learned how to navigate my way through classes without appearing too opinionated, often staying after school to seek additional help with lessons.

By the time I entered college I had begun to shape my own theory regarding the disparity among urban students. Hence, attending a predominately White university as an undergraduate and graduate student at different institutions is when I completely became aware of my learning environment. The presence of my race changed the atmosphere and

how professors of different ethnic and social classes assessed my academic abilities based on my race. I became accustomed to being viewed as mediocre or below average by professors who dismissed my intellectual commentary during classroom discussions. As a result, I learned how to allow my work such as written assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests to speak indirectly for me.

These experiences shaped my understandings regarding how different social classes and races were treated and the lack of cultural sensitivity among teachers. As I entered the field of education and became a teacher, I believed that my bad experiences in school were isolated until I became a teacher at Story Town Learning Center. It was here that I received a good dose of reality. The school resided within an urban school district that served a population of students who were predominately African American and Hispanic students. Each year at Story Town Learning Center, two teachers were selected by the director to plan school trips for the entire school. The two teachers selected, who were both Caucasian, thought it was a good ideal for the students to visit a farm and pick cotton. While the students at this school may not have understood the historical issues of picking cotton, their parents and grandparents were aware. Cotton was considered an intensive human labor of using hands carried out by over one and half million African Americans known as slaves during the 1800s (York Castle Museum, 2011). The result was a planned call out by the African American and Hispanic teachers and staff. Once the issue was addressed the school became racially divided over the lack of sensitivity of that particular trip. Throughout my history of attending urban schools, there have been countless incidents by teachers who lacked a cultural consciousness.

This study holds a strong significance for addressing teacher accountability, understanding, and implementing a student's diverse culture into the curriculum. There is sufficient research and studies of African American teachers who successfully implemented pedagogies in urban schools (Stanford, 1997). It is the duty of teachers and administrators to effectively acknowledge and incorporate diversity within the classroom and refrain from prejudicial behavior about a group of people based on their social class, race, or ethnicity (Montgomery, 2001). The implications of teachers who can implement effective culturally responsive teaching in the classroom demonstrate a productive learning environment that creates a better learning environment and a better teacher-student relationship. This qualitative case study research explored how participants came to understand the impact of their use of culturally responsive pedagogy within their classroom.

Data indicate that between 2020 and 2030, half of the student population within the United States will be from various backgrounds (Hernandez, 2004). In order for teachers who currently teach in urban schools to implement students' culture they must reflect the ever changing diversity of students that enter their classrooms and become culturally aware of the differences among their students while implementing useful teaching techniques for students (West-Olatunji, Behar-Horenstein, & Rant, 2008). Often, there is minimal time for early childhood teachers to effectively collaborate with each other to solve problems within their classrooms or read research on current effective techniques addressing classroom concerns (West-Olatunji et al., 2008).

Similar to West-Olatunji et al. (2008), this qualitative action research study also served as a means of helping and informing those early childhood teachers regarding

effective and current practices to help impact classroom environment. Furthermore, scholars assert that because students from various backgrounds often exhibit fears about their new environment and they need culturally responsive support from teachers to adjust (McAllister & Jordan-Irvine, 2002). Teachers' instructional techniques and how they integrated a student's culture, experience, and environment into their classrooms was documented and explored. I first investigated, within this qualitative case study, how teachers felt about integrating their student's culture into the classroom environment, their formal understanding regarding integrating culturally responsive pedagogy, and how teachers utilized a student's culture/experience into their teaching techniques and classroom. The knowledge that I sought provides insight on how utilizing culturally relevant teaching strategies could impact the learning environment. For instance, by connecting how students function through culturally relevant teaching, it enabled them to participate in class and the construction of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2009a).

Classroom teachers sometimes pose a contradiction by their expectations of students who enter school for the very first time. For example, early childhood kindergarten teachers anticipate that students come to school reading and then take offense with the students who cannot (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). This study was important because it looked at establishing early intervention in early childhood. Early intervention in early childhood is critical to impacting student success and improving classroom climate (ASCD, 2006).

Teachers within this qualitative study were introduced to responsive classroom practices and then learned how to implement them through professional development workshops. The premise of my study looked at early intervention as a critical bridge for helping resolve any future achievement gaps. Through implementing culturally responsive

approaches at the early childhood level, the expectation is that the study will help reduce current and future academic disparities.

I examined the contents of NCLB for its impact on public education with executing more testing and accountability and its lack of pedagogical practices for urban schools. Despite the fanfare of NCLB, there is lack of evidence of implementing pedagogical practices and connecting pedagogy to fair diversity. Despite the implications of educating all children, the NCLB act has not implemented an equal education for ethnically diverse students in urban schools. Therefore, it is imperative that public school teachers, leaders, and researchers look to establish strategic based techniques for the welfare of these students. Strategic based techniques utilize previous scholars' constructive approaches such as Ladson-Billings (2009a) and Gay (2000, 2002), who have previous success with implementing change within urban classrooms.

### **Limitations of Study**

One limitation of this research was that it was difficult to observe teacher-student interactions outside of the classroom. My role as researcher was limited to only observing the participants in their classroom because of my own instructional duties and responsibilities as a teacher. Therefore, the study was not able to examine the use of culturally responsive approaches outside of the classroom. No evidence of observations of teachers outside the classroom might imply that culturally responsive practices might occur in other parts of the school besides the classroom. Another limitation of the study was the limited time frame of conducting research. Although the school district permitted me 10 months to conduct research, the study ended three months earlier to accommodate

the school district's annual testing schedule for kindergarten and mandated state visits for Pre-kindergarten.

The study was not able to address the impact of a teacher's transformed pedagogy on student success or the impact the study may have on pre-kindergarten students entering kindergarten next year. In addition, the purposeful sampling of qualitative case study research was limited to four early childhood teachers with less than three years of experience at their current school. The small size may not have represented the perspectives of the larger population of early childhood teachers at Daniel Preschool.

### **Conclusion**

The shortage of teachers that reflect the students' diverse cultural population is evident in the vocation of education. There is not a one size fits all type of philosophy when approaching diverse classrooms. There is an urgency to explore how teachers incorporate students' culture within classroom instruction and the impact it has on the student and learning environment. Research on culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching within the classroom includes "academic achievement, sociopolitical consciousness, and cultural competence" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, as cited in Landsman & Lewis, 2006, p.29). While I examined teachers' beliefs and pedagogy within the study, I encouraged teachers to take a stance of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The goal of this literature review is to use current literature and draw on seminal research to substantiate the importance of multicultural education in an urban pre-school. The literature review offers an opportunity to explore the transformative potential of culturally responsive pedagogy for low socioeconomic status African American students. The research focuses on several areas within the literature that support the need for multicultural education as a student's basic right. This study may serve as the voice of the voiceless and an instrument for advocating social justice among ethnically diverse students. The chapter primarily focuses on the following areas related to the study: a) multicultural education; b) social inequality; c) background of culturally relevant teaching; d) cultural knowledge of pre-service and current teachers; e) sociocultural perspectives; f) teacher's role in culturally relevant teaching; g) implementing culturally relevant teaching in urban settings; and, h) restructuring culturally responsive pedagogy through professional development. This section will examine how all of these areas interconnect as a means for substantiating the importance of multicultural education in an urbanized school.

#### **Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is a pedagogical stance that embraces significant descriptions for dispelling social injustices within public schools such as: 1) antiracist education, 2) basic education, 3) important for diverse students, 4) pervasive, and 5) basic education for social justice, a process and critical pedagogy (Nieto, 2000). Teachers who

are able to demonstrate a stance on multicultural education are able to connect to their students on a much higher level. Teachers who are culturally sensitive to their students educational needs, have a clear understanding of how to instruct them and reject mainstream European pedagogy in their instruction. Teachers who consider a student's culture and make expectations clear from the start of class have students who tend to adjust better to their school environment (Delpit, 2006; King, 1994). This literature review helps frame a discussion on social inequality and uses multicultural education as a response to the deficit of perspectives on implementing student's culture within public urban schools. The literature within this chapter identifies the many facets of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy that will be explored from the background of social inequality to the inception of culturally responsive pedagogy. Through the research there were many elements that illustrated the advantages as well as the disadvantages of utilizing multicultural education.

**Advantages of multicultural education.** Implementing multicultural education through culturally responsive pedagogy is a means of acknowledging, exploring, and using the cultural diversity of students as a knowledge base to form relationships with students and impact student achievement. Educating students within the United States has long focused on European centered instruction that typically celebrates the cultural diversity of African American students during the month of February. It is important to include students' culture as a means of connecting them to the school. The United States has long been seen as a society deeply rooted in European culture and history as we are inundated with the media's images of how they define beauty using primarily European models and what dominates society (Shujaa, 1998). Therefore the implementation of

multicultural education is a response to mainstream European culture within low socioeconomic urban schools. Ogbu (1988) notes that understanding the students' culture and community attributes to their family in how they view education and all important elements for students. The absence of a student's culture within a classroom is the absence of acknowledging the student. The advantage of utilizing multicultural education is that it focuses on altering instead of adding to the current curriculum. Rather, it acknowledges fair treatment of students, examining the curriculum and teaching tools, district policies as well as the relationship among teacher, student and their families (Nieto, 1996).

Effective implementation of multicultural education continuously embraces school reform and works to enhance student achievement. This type of implementation and ownership of effective multicultural education is executed by the teacher. While scholars such as Banks (1999), King (1994), Hollins (1994), Gay (2000), and Ladson-Billings (1999) support their own models of multicultural education of minority students in public schools, there are several disadvantages for implementing a culturally diverse curriculum. One of the limitations of research and restructuring teacher pedagogy is that it does not address student accountability among students in low socioeconomic early childhood schools. Research about multicultural education and accountability among students in urban preschools has not been thoroughly explored by scholars, which divulges implications for future research.

**Disadvantages of multicultural education.** While the research demonstrates the importance of implementing multicultural education through reforming teacher pedagogy, there are several reasons that multicultural education is not effective in

improving student achievement among minorities (Ogbu, 1992). A part of the disadvantage argument is that students are not held accountable for the implementation of multicultural education. The model for multicultural education leaves much of the work for reform on teachers and schools often exempting students of their responsibility (Ogbu, 1992). Ogbu addresses flaws of several multicultural models of previous scholars who advocate incorporating culturally diversity within public schools. One interesting aspect that Ogbu points out as a flawed model is that the models do not directly relate to the culture and language of minorities. Furthermore, Ogbu states that by implementing a student's culture actually causes problems and cannot be easily rectified by implementing student's culture into the curriculum or reforming the teacher's pedagogical stance.

Although Ogbu makes a strong argument for the disadvantage of implementing multicultural education within low socioeconomic public schools, he does not differentiate in his research the required age for accountability of students. Although accountability is important in education, it holds little relevance for early childhood students' ability for transforming teachers' pedagogical stance within early childhood.

This is important because early childhood students are not at a developmental point where they are self-sufficient and can be accountable for impacting their learning. While it is important to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural education, it is interesting that there is a gap in the literature that primarily focused on the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural education as it relates to urban early childhood schools.

## **Social Inequality of African Americans in the United States**

This review of literature begins with a discussion of how social injustice contributes to the creation of incorrect generalizations of minorities and how this continues to impede their academic success within the United States. The implication for utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy is a means of changing society's portrayal of stereotypes of minorities. This study sought to explore the concepts of incorporating elements of culturally responsive pedagogical practices in the classroom to help create an environment conducive for student learning (Gay, 2000). The information presented in this chapter supports the foundation for the necessity of the study including impacting classroom climate and building teacher-student relationships through culturally responsive teaching in an early childhood urban school setting (Gay, 2000).

In 1935, W.E.B. DuBois asked the question, "Do Blacks need separate schools?" This question was a result of what DuBois observed regarding the inequality of education provided to African Americans during his time. Recent evidence suggests that the United States, many decades later, still demonstrates that the truth still exists of education and inequality. That truth is evident from *Abbott v. Burke* court ruling in 1985 and the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. The truth is that urban schools are still segregated, defined by their lack of funds, resources, and quality teachers. The *Abbott v. Burke* ruling stated that public and primary education in poor communities throughout the state of New Jersey was "unconstitutionally substandard." The NCLB Act, established on January 8, 2001 by former President George W. Bush, sought to give students in grades 3-8 an annual assessment in reading and math. The goal of this act was to "even the playing field" and improve education for minorities, low income, and other subgroups

(No Child Left Behind, 2001). This act strongly links student success to quality teachers. The act describes highly qualified teaching, but according to Ardila-Rey (2008), excludes cultural requirements of teacher preparation programs for teaching diverse populations. Likewise, teachers are not culturally prepared to deal with the issues of students who reside in urbanized populations. Students who reside in low socioeconomic environments often display a difference in their family structure, which is substantively different from mainstream European culture. Ogbu (1990) describes the Black family structure as non-supportive of school achievement. Therefore, teachers should focus on obtaining knowledge on how to tailor their pedagogy so that it reflects African American students. King (1994) describes the preparation of teachers as being able to teach African American students using their culture as a knowledge base. The gap in academic achievement among minorities is often linked to low socioeconomic status and underachievement among African Americans in the United States. The result of the achievement gap tends to perpetuate inequality and social injustice. Furthermore, the issue of inequality speaks to the history of social injustice among minorities and is examined in this section through viewing statistics on the achievement gap to establish a foundation for implementing culturally responsive teaching within an urban school. The achievement gap within the United States continues to remain a high priority in education. The past half-century has witnessed considerable gains in educational attainment in the United States. Between 1950 and 2005, the percentage of young adults ages 25 to 29 who had completed high school moved from 53% to 86%. For young Caucasian adults, the percentage increased from 56% to 93%, and for young African American adults it increased from 24% to 86%. In 2007, the national and state mathematics scores in grades 4 and 8 on the National

Assessment of Educational Progress were at their highest levels. Since the early 1990s, reading scores for the nation and a substantial number of states have also increased but still do not match the success of their peers from affluent backgrounds (NCES, 2010). Despite some schools low performance, they are still responsible for making yearly progress despite the fact that they are underfunded while serving disadvantaged students. In addition, some states intentionally lower performance standards to help limit categorizing schools as failing (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Although the achievement gap has been the main focus within education, so has the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This lack of resources often leads to a variety of problems, such as an influx of crime, minimal productivity, and limited materials to help low socioeconomic students (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

### **Background of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching is described as utilizing a set of strategies to help facilitate quality education to a culturally diverse population of students (Green, 1964 as cited in Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999). It was during the 1980s and 1990s that culturally responsive pedagogy began addressing the academic challenges of minority students (Martin, 1997). Culturally responsive teaching is an educational approach that places emphasis on using the students' culture, language, and background, as a knowledge base for implementing school district's curriculum. Ladson-Billings (2009a) describes her process of implementing and restructuring teaching pedagogy through a process called filtering. The filtering process is described as incorporating six suggested strategies of culturally responsive teaching particularly into the current classroom management style by the teacher:

1. Students with indefinite future are given leadership roles in the classroom.
2. Teacher displays confidence in students by given them extra time to think about an answer to a new unfamiliar concept.
3. Students' real-life experiences are incorporated into the curriculum.
4. Teachers and students participate in unique construction of literacy that allows the student to ask their own questions and then determine the answers.
5. Teachers help students understand and reject society's minimal expectations of them.
6. Teachers understand that their job has political implications and that they must help student reach cultural excellence.

Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of diverse students as a means for adequately teaching them. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching is illustrated utilizing the following six techniques:

Validation—using different styles of teaching to diverse students and make learning more efficient while focusing on the strengths of each student.

Comprehensive— teaching to the entire student, which includes social and emotional, cognitive, and subject matter.

Multidimensional— involving several items such as focusing on instructional content, learning context, classroom environment, student-teacher relationships, instructional strategies, and assessments of student performance.

Empowerment—encouraging students and motivating them to believe in their own success through learning.

Transformative—using students’ cultural background experiences and respect are utilized as well as incorporated into instructional lessons. This method demonstrates appreciation of students’ accomplishments and helps motivate them further in instruction.

Emancipatory—guiding students into understanding that there are many definitions of “truth” and all are imperfect.

Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2009a) are similar because they use approaches for incorporating culturally responsive practices into the classroom. However, they also are different in their approach to culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2000) uses a more precise approach to transforming a teacher’s current pedagogical stance, while Ladson-Billings (2009a) speaks of culturally responsive pedagogy as a theory but does not give concrete techniques for transforming a teacher’s current pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2009a) uses of culturally responsive approaches are more geared towards pre-service teachers.

### **Cultural Knowledge, Pre-service and Current Teachers**

Gay (2002) argues that pre-service teachers need preparation for implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies and prolonged knowledge is necessary to meet the educational needs of diverse populations of students. Pre-service teachers are inexperienced and have limited knowledge, skills, and sound culturally responsive teaching strategies necessary for meeting the needs of diverse population of students (Howard, 2003; Knight & Wiseman, 2005). Gay’s argument explores the assertion that pre-service teachers do need preparation for integrating culturally responsive pedagogy. However, teachers who currently teach need their instructional techniques reformed to also meet the educational needs of their diverse students. In this literature review, a

comparison is examined between the similarities of pre-service teachers and current teachers in regards to their lack of cultural competencies and ineffective instructional methods with diverse students. Nieto (2000) states that these types of teachers tend not to build on their students' cultural background or identity. Reforming veteran teachers is comparable to training pre-service teachers. The teachers in this study demonstrate their formal knowledge base of culturally responsive pedagogy received prior to the study. In this study, the teachers' level of understanding and approaches for incorporating their students' culture into their daily instructional is comparable to pre-service teachers' knowledge base of fostering cultural responsiveness. Although the teachers in this study have formal knowledge, they also have limited knowledge with strong skills for addressing the needs of their African American students.

A teacher's knowledge regarding implementing culturally diverse instruction should exceed mere recognition and include awareness and respect of various ethnic groups and their different ways of expression (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching utilizes the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of diverse populations of students as a framework for implementing effective teaching (Gay, 2002). In Gilbert's (1995) study of rural pre-service teachers, approximately 40% of new teachers disclosed that their interaction with someone from another race or culture was either social or that they had not interacted with people racially or culturally different from themselves. Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 70% felt it was unnecessary and did not desire any direct experiences in urban, minority schools (Gilbert, 1995). The fact that pre-service teachers might not willingly venture to engage in a diverse range of people is not uncommon as racially isolated neighborhoods foster structures that shape their cognitive,

social, and emotional understanding of people from various ethnic backgrounds (Bonilla-Silva, 2001).

As a result, new and current teachers within urban school districts sometimes lack skills and ability to prepare students with skills for functioning outside of school. Research indicates that most pre-service teachers trained in teacher preparation programs are young, middle-class females who grew up in towns less than 100 miles from their college and anticipate teaching in similar towns or suburban schools (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1987; Sleeter, 2001). As a result, the pre-service teachers then become veteran teachers with the same mentality of instructional techniques. However, teachers who desire to understand effective teaching strategies in urban classrooms can do so by learning from other veteran teachers, primarily within their school. This statement only holds value if the veteran teacher is, according to Ladson-Billings (1995b), as culturally responsive. Lipman (1993) also states that by providing opportunities for observation of culturally responsive teaching by teaming the student teacher up with a veteran teacher helps implement techniques for fostering culturally responsive pedagogy. Finally, embracing student teaching over a longer period of time in the same school for an entire school year also helps construct pre-service teaching strategies and instructional skills.

Cultivating pre-service teacher skills is important while establishing a culturally responsive classroom environment and is a helpful tool for linking the curriculum to the current population of students. The main purpose for reforming teacher education programs is to learn how to educate ethnically diverse populations and impact student achievement (Townsend, 2002). Teacher education must take courageous steps to ensure

that all teachers are well prepared to effectively teach ethnically diverse learners (Townsend, 2002). Therefore, establishing culturally responsive pedagogy certification programs is beneficial to the large numbers of diverse students in public school education. To become more responsive to the needs of culturally diverse students, teacher-training programs must provide teacher candidates with specialized training in culturally responsive education (Townsend, 2002). The pre-service teachers and the teachers within this study share similar commonalties of their lack of cultural competencies. Therefore, this study is a response to the teachers who finished teacher preparation programs, currently teaching in an early childhood classroom and demonstrate insufficient evidence of cultural proficiency in cultural responsive pedagogy.

There is evidence-based research that has demonstrated particular characteristics of culturally responsive teachers and the important elements of culturally responsive pedagogy (Villegas, 2002). Villegas describes effective culturally responsive teachers as educational change leaders who understand how their students frame knowledge. The teacher is capable of implementing their students' experiences and knowledge into the curriculum while stretching their current concept of information. The early childhood years of a student are by far the most important period of growth and learning new things (Souto-Manning, 2009).

### **Sociocultural Perspectives: Pedagogy and Curriculum**

Preschool may be the first setting in which students experience environmental values and are expected to imitate those values daily (Souto-Manning, 2009). Students who are from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds are often required to learn in unfamiliar cultural contexts other than their experiences within their families,

communities, and homes (Lahman & Park 2004). This section on pedagogy and curriculum in early childhood education connects culturally responsive teaching and student success within the classroom. Studies conducted by Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2009b) share many similarities on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay defines implementing culturally responsive pedagogy as an action that focuses on taking the student's culture and interconnecting it into the classroom curriculum. Ladson-Billings (2009a) describes culturally responsive pedagogy as a theory that all students are capable and able to meet high standards, but does not describe in detail how to implement this theory within the classroom. For the purposes of this study, I use the term culturally responsive pedagogy as a means of implementing the student's culture into the classroom curriculum. Some students struggle with maintaining school and classroom expectations. Often the classroom does not present a conducive learning environment for the student as well as the teacher's pedagogy. Many students of diverse backgrounds experience difficulty in schools where traditional teachers have attempted to include culture into the curriculum, instead of including education into culture. Students who are from different social classes and cultural backgrounds experience difficulty within urban classrooms with traditional teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Traditional teachers base their lessons on addressing the common core standards and its connection to the district curriculum, rather than incorporating culturally responsive techniques for diverse groups of students (Ogbu, 1992). According to Ladson-Billings (1995b) for almost 15 years, anthropologists have looked at ways to interconnect students' culture and school. This work has had multiple labels including "culturally appropriate" (Au & Jordan, 1981), "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), "culturally responsive" (Cazden & Leggett,

1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and “culturally compatible” (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). There is a problem with connecting what students encounter in their own cultural environment and the expectations at school, which include speech and language between teacher and students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). However, the focus of this research is the connecting of student culture and school, bridging both worlds together. Connecting the students’ home environment, which includes their culture and the school environment, requires that the teacher gains knowledge of their students in order to help build a strong teacher-student relationship. Teachers who communicate with the family of their students in culturally reliable ways implement culturally responsive pedagogy (Ruggiano-Schmidt & Finkbeiner, 2006; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Through linking the curriculum to the student’s family background, teachers validate the student and improve student achievement (Ruggiano-Schmidt & Finkbeiner, 2006). Teachers must become diligent with meeting students where they are in academics and including education within their culture. Besides having the awareness and knowledge, teachers who obtain a strong knowledge base about ethnic and cultural diversity, also need to learn how to convert that knowledge base into a culturally responsive curriculum and instructional strategies.

Through the examination of the literature, several approaches for incorporating culturally relevant curriculum were revealed. The traditional method of establishing culturally relevant curriculum is linked to textbooks and other standards of education such as curriculum standards according to a particular state. Culturally responsive teachers are knowledgeable enough to detect the strengths and weaknesses of school curriculum designs and make the necessary changes to improve instruction for students

(Gay, 2002). One method of transforming the current curriculum is by teaching pre-service and veteran teachers how to examine teaching materials for cultural effectiveness (Gay, 2002). Three kinds of curricula are routinely present in the classroom, each of which offers different opportunities for teaching cultural diversity (Gay, 2002). Curriculum is often described as a set of educational tools needed to teach a certain topic within a school.

The first type of curriculum includes formal lesson plans, which utilize district textbooks that dictate the scope of lessons. This type of curriculum leaves little latitude for teachers to incorporate their own type of philosophy of instruction. The second type of plan is called symbolic curriculum, which includes awards and celebrations used to teach students. This is the most common form of symbolic curriculum, which includes bulletin board displays, classroom rules, classroom beliefs and values, as well as rewards of achievement (Gay, 2002). This approach includes images, mottos, awards, celebrations, and other forms to increase morals and values of students. Therefore, classroom and school walls become advertisements for student achievement and students' learning are much more meaningful from the displays. Students over time will expect to see certain displays in the classroom and appreciate their presence (Gay, 2002). However, this form of curriculum can have an adverse effect if the use of this approach is not connected to the students' cultural background, making it symbolic in nature but not meaningful to the students. The third form of curriculum includes societal curriculum. This type of curriculum communicates ideas and impressions about other ethnic groups normally communicated through the media (Cortes, 1991, 1995, 2000). This notion is based on the ways in which the media portrays a particular social and ethnic class. For

some students the media is the only venue for understanding their ethnicity (Cortes, 1995). However, Campbell (1995) found that by incorporating these types of false media images only perpetuates myths about the life of ethnically diverse student, which contributes to the portrayal of minority cultures as insignificant. The main element for establishing culturally responsive teaching is creating an environment that is conducive for learning for ethnically diverse learners. Teachers who negate the culture of their students and the way in which they learn hinder the students' academic success. Culturally responsive teachers comprehend how incorporating mainstream learning techniques may interfere with and impact student achievement; therefore they learn how to establish a more conducive learning environment based on the cultural background of the students (Gay, 2002). This section explored the literature on formal lesson plans, symbolic curriculum, and societal curriculum as a method for future observations of the participant's theory in use for fostering culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Teacher's Role in Fostering Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The ongoing interactions between teacher and student and student between students are significant parts of a learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Culturally responsive classrooms should demonstrate strong relationships among students and teacher as well as among peers. The classroom should establish expectations of mutual respect between students and teachers as well as among other students (Marzano, 2003). Teachers directly impact student achievement and classroom climate by totally restructuring their attitudes and beliefs about their students and their environment. The teacher has a responsibility to influence impact or change current teaching practices.

Hence, poor performing schools often are a reflection of unenthused teachers educating students of low-income districts. Reforming poorly qualified teachers, teachers with no expectations, teachers with limited experience, lack of community support, and money for education all play a part in tackling student achievement. The research seeks to impact how teachers understand what success means in education and how to effectively achieve it in urban classrooms. Teachers should exercise caution in understanding success and how literature centered around the achievement gap focuses on one means of success such as test scores (Childress, 2009; Murphy, 2009; Stigler & Hiebert 2009).

The capacity of teachers to effectively affect achievement scores may be incidental, but the impact of classroom environment is directly linked to embracing culturally responsive teaching. Townsend (2002) states that mandatory certification in learning how to implement culturally responsive pedagogy should be included in teacher preparatory programs. This suggestion of mandatory certification is an effort to standardize culturally responsive pedagogy implementation and provides new teachers with skills to benefit both the teacher and the student but says little to the nation's veteran teachers. Over the past decade, misclassifications were widespread among the African-American and Hispanic culture within the education system. According to Townsend (2002), this label of misclassification is not new and remains unresolved. Historically, African-American and Hispanic students have been overrepresented in special education classes for children with emotional and behavioral disorders. Townsend (2002) further discussed overrepresentation of these students as a means of educational institutions controlling urban students within these districts. Thus, cultural differences contribute to

over representation of students placed in special education classes based on their cultural differences and behaviors (Park, Pullis, Reilly & Townsend, 1994).

### **Implementing Culturally Responsive Practices in Urban Settings**

There are approaches for establishing an effective culturally responsive classroom. One approach to creating a good classroom climate is implementing classroom management (Brown, 2003). Implementing classroom management helps teachers achieve the goal of order and structure with an awareness of the diversity in their classrooms (Weinstein et al., 2003).

**Classroom environment.** Earlier in the chapter, three types of curriculum were discussed in their connection to integrating cultural diversity in the classroom—formal lesson plans, symbolic curriculum, and societal curriculum (Gay, 2002). The symbolic curriculum, which focuses on the classroom environment, is most essential to students in an early childhood classroom. The classroom environment within this study serves as an approach for analyzing and interpreting the data. The study utilizes Weiner's (2003) assertion of utilizing culturally responsive management to substantiate its impact and further educational implications. Managing a culturally responsive classroom according to Weinstein et al. (2003) includes: (a) creating physical environment anchored around academic and social goals, which includes student photographs, personalized group discussion that utilize student created bulletin board displays; (b) creating classroom rules and expectations for student behavior; (c) speaking to students using common and appropriate language so that their conversation is consistent with students' cultural backgrounds; (d) developing a conscious classroom that acknowledges students' diverse background by speaking to them in their native language; (e) working with families to

help provide direction regarding their children's education and academic achievement; and (f) using appropriate interventions to help students with challenging behavior problems such as redirection and rewarding acceptable behaviors. According to Hale-Benson (1982) many Black and lower-income children have a need to connect the learning process to their own experience and as a result, these students may appear over-involved by their questions in the learning process. Often, this over-involvement is perceived by teachers as disruptive behavior (Gilbert, 1995).

**Classroom management.** Part of classroom management also involves providing instruction to the students. The classroom should convey a message that school is committed to engaging students in academic advancement (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). For instance, engaging students in meaningful academic assignments that challenge their abilities help eliminate classroom disruptions. In Ladson-Billings' (2009a) study on high poverty classrooms, she describes the term "teach for meaning" evolved as a way of keeping students on task. This type of instruction helps students understand the connection between classroom lessons and their daily life experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). Teachers who consistently incorporate their students' cultural experiences into the curriculum help foster better relationships between them and their students. The study attempted to cultivate a stance within this study so that the participants would successfully develop a professional relationship with their students inside the school. The purpose of teachers establishing healthy relationships with their students would seek to create stronger community partnerships. The teachers within this study would have to challenge the state and district curriculum to transform their current pedagogy.

Relationships between teacher and student improve when teachers treat students as capable of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). Culturally responsive teaching is not a quick fix for students who academically struggle, but is a process that crafts decision making of teachers (Weinstein et al., 2003). An effective culturally responsive classroom demonstrates an educator who acknowledges and respects the cultural diversity of the students (Noddings, 1992). Creating an environment based on caring and concern, where each student is valued, the effect is that students become motivated to learn (Stipek, 2002). Teachers who take specific time out during their day to self-reflect often become more skilled, utilizing techniques that work with their students impacting change for student achievement.

Teachers who take specific time out of their day to reflect and purposely plan to adapt to their students culture often impact the students in positive ways. Allocating time to utilize self-reflection is necessary for all teachers whether pre-service, novice, or veteran. Routine self-reflection is an important tool for improving teaching strategies and continual professional development. Teachers who reflect on their own teaching strategies make time to ensure that students are successful in their learning (Hoffman-Kipp, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 1999). Culturally responsive teachers must utilize personal self-reflection to examine their cultural beliefs about teaching students from social classes that are not parallel to their own. When teachers actively assess their pedagogy they ultimately confront unseen biases that may have influenced their pedagogy. Utilizing self-reflection and knowing oneself helps construct a worldview to examine ones individual experiences (Buenida, Meacham, & Noffke, 2000).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Several scholars link the use of utilizing marginalized pre-k students' culture as a knowledge base for class instruction rather than an obstacle to stifle student growth (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1998; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). This research revealed that there were distinct connections among researchers for utilizing a student's culture from low socioeconomic status to promote student success. The theoretical framework also utilizes culturally relevant theory as a means of creating an equitable learning environment by formulating cultural responsiveness as a means of helping culturally diverse students excel within school. Culturally relevant theory establishes a framework to support my argument and justification of the importance of incorporating culturally responsive teaching to help improve student achievement. Implementing multicultural education is used within this study because it lines up with the philosophy of conducting qualitative research, particularly utilizing action research to create change. The intent of exploring culturally responsive teaching is to establish positive social change through action research.

In addition, critical race theory was introduced in 1994, as a lens to view, analyze, and critique educational research and practice (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Bell (1992) came up with this term, which he utilized to explore how laws and institutions embraced racism. Bell's book on "Race, Racism, and American Law" describes how institutions reinforce racism sometimes knowingly and unknowingly. The theoretical framework utilized within this research utilizes several theorists to discuss the importance of implementing multicultural education in low socioeconomic urban school districts as it

works to eliminate the deficit model. While critical race theory is discussed within this section it is a small element of the theoretical lens as a basis for implementing multicultural education in urban preschools.

The theoretical framework utilized within this research examined inequalities and social injustices within the classroom, while seeking to reform teacher practices.

Multicultural education is used as a means for establishing critical pedagogy as well as transforming teacher's current pedagogy (Nieto, 2004). The term was used to explore how education can conceptualize how students from low socioeconomic school districts might better adjust to academic institutions. Often, the lack of sensitivity to African American students' culture is camouflaged and nearly undetectable intertwined into the foundations and policies of institutions such as churches, K-12 public schools, government, and postsecondary institutions (Solórzano, 2000). Therefore, the transition of a student from preschool to a family school is important identified by the use of the student's understanding of race or ethnicity, which is concrete and associated with specific identifiers such the common language spoken, cultural foods, and personal physical traits (Tatum, 1997). This is an essential piece of fostering culturally response teaching practices for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. There is a strong correlation between minority students of low SES and low achievement (Bond, 1981).

During the preschool years children learn how to identify themselves through the speech of their parents. Parents hold an important role in helping their children make sense of their experiences (Tatum, 1997). It is also important that the early childhood teachers help their students make sense of their classroom experiences through the use of culturally approaches. Vygotsky (1978) states that knowledge is constructed through the

dialogue and participation of others' experiences, particularly between parent and child (Vygotsky, 1978). He states that the development of language is established by thought development. Children, during their early childhood stages, experience a change in their development as their culture dictates their behavior (Tappan, 1997). Because communication is an important part of this study, many of the observations will focus on the central point of interaction between the student and teacher. Gee (2001) describes these interactions between teacher and student as an identity. The argument of utilizing culturally relevant theory and multicultural education supports reforming teacher practices. Both theories have overlapping themes that focus on evoking positive change among diverse populations of students.

### **Restructuring Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development**

Restructuring current teacher pedagogy takes knowledge and effort on the part of the teacher. Traditional teacher training programs focus a small portion of their lessons on the themes of diversity and the vast majority on curriculum. Impacting student achievement and classroom environment can happen through creating a tailored plan for a school through the use of professional development. The beliefs about the necessity of culturally responsive teaching are based on (a) equity and multicultural education; (b) teacher accountability that believes in self-reflection and analysis of teaching beliefs, values and attitudes; and (c) teachers' need to critically think about what is taught, how, and to whom. These beliefs are supported by scholars such as Danielewicz (2001), Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (2005), Palmer (1998), Schön (1983), Valli (1992), and Zeichner and Liston (1996). This study utilizes workshops as a way of engaging teachers and

restructuring culturally responsive practices, which catered to adult learning to help diminish social injustices within the classroom.

The next section addresses the link between in-servicing current teachers and the methods best used for implementing new classroom strategies that address culturally responsive pedagogy. The context of professional development has had major influences on adult learners and the ways in which teachers instruct students. Phillips, McNaughton, and MacDonald (2004) studied the outcome of teachers in a school and the results of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy compared to the teachers who had not received professional development. The research demonstrated that the students whose teachers participated in the professional development workshops, attained higher academic results than the students of teachers who had not participated in workshops. A gap in the literature exists as it pertains to the impact on student achievement and professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy (Sleeter, 2012). Malcolm Knowles (1984), deemed the father of adult learning theory, distinguishes major differences between the needs of adult requirements versus teaching children and their needs, which supports the need for professional development with transforming teachers' instructional practices. Knowles defines professional development as:

Adults should add to their own learning and establish responsibility in assisting others in their learning.

Self-reflection is essential for continuous learning. The professional development workshops must have relevance to their current problem.

Adults should play an active part in the creation of new learning. New knowledge must focus on personal or professional growth.

Adults should partner with other colleagues to collaborate and take responsibility for their own learning.

Self-standards of measurement must regulate adult leaning.

Knowles' (1984), description of professional development and use of its meaning is essential for the action research part of transforming teachers' pedagogy in this study. A major part of transforming teachers' pedagogical stance is helping them add to their own learning while assisting their colleagues with growth. The professional development workshops used in this study to reconstruct teachers' pedagogical beliefs are designed to help them become active participants in their learning. When teachers are active in their participation of learning new concepts it is more meaningful.

Knowles' (1984) research involves adult learning professional development as well as effective teaching (Lewis, 1999; Montgomery, 2006). The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching describes effective professional development as: a) teaching with direct purpose, b) utilizing research for collectively solving problems in organized adult professional learning communities, c) gathering and analyzing data to determine goals for students, d) utilizing various sources of data to improve current classroom conditions, e) focusing on school based teacher improvement, f) enhancing teacher knowledge with research based strategies to complement academic standards, g) supporting and following up with continuous professional development, and h) improving student learning through supportive stakeholders (Lewis, 1999; Montgomery, 2006).

Previously, the discussion on Knowles (1984) addressed the appropriate use of professional development for this study. The National Partnership for Excellence and

Accountability in Teaching also adds credibility to the use focusing on teachers' responsibility for addressing culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. The description of professional development offers effective techniques to address teacher accountability but also becomes a guide for the researcher for conducting workshops. Teacher accountability is an important piece of helping teachers transform their current pedagogy. The participants must come to understand their part in the change process in order for it to achieve success.

For the purpose of this study, professional development is utilized as a means towards implementing effective culturally responsive teaching strategies to help impact classroom climate and student learning. This study utilized both Knowles' (1984) research on adult learners as well as descriptions of adult learning professional development from The National Partnership of Excellence and Accountability (Lewis, 1999). Teachers who utilize culturally responsive teaching strategies help establish a foundation for an effective classroom learning environment that meets the needs of the students while holding promise for increasing student achievement. The research described in this section utilized a variety of synthesized literature, and although the dominant strategies involved addressing restructuring current pedagogical practices, the success of impacting urban city classrooms was solely dependent upon teachers and what they attained from professional development workshops. This research on culturally responsive teaching can only profit the students at Daniel Preschool when self-reflection is sought and it is fashioned into a useful practice by teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The literature in this chapter established a framework of importance for restructuring pedagogical practices applicable to Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten urban school. The literature helped identify the importance of implementing multicultural education. The research suggests the following: (a) gaps exist in student achievement among urban students, (b) culturally responsive teaching helps improve urban academic settings, and (c) professional development is a great method for restructuring current ideas regarding pedagogical practices. Even as I reviewed the body of literature on culturally responsive pedagogy there was limited evidence of addressing the topic at the early childhood level. Individuals on a state level that coordinate teaching programs in academic institutions and alternate route programs have a significant responsibility in addressing the issues that evolve from urban classrooms.

The study of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy identified two major highlights of this research. The role of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy ensures that culturally diverse students receive a quality education. The other point is that using culturally responsive pedagogy through multicultural education will streamline social injustice in urban schools. This review of literature collectively establishes a focal point of the study around the different sections of this chapter as a theoretical stance, and may contribute to the implications for future research of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy in urban early childhood classrooms.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The diversity within public schools has become increasingly apparent in the forms of different cultures, races, and languages of students (Brown, 2007). There are several possible reasons why students from diverse populations demonstrate difficulty with academic achievement and self-esteem; however, the dominant reason is the way educators respond to the diversity of students within their classroom (Brown, 2007). A student's culture, traditions, and beliefs help construct meaning as well as define social interactions among other individuals (King, 1994). A student's culture shapes their definition of family, belonging, and self-worth. Banks (1997) describes culture as a set of certain behaviors, symbolic identifiers, values, and other elements that distinguishes one ethnic group from another. The word culture in this study refers to values, behavior styles, dialect, nonverbal communication, and perspectives (Banks, 1999). Additionally culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as centering teaching strategies through positive relationships with the student's culture and environment while implementing the district's curriculum. School culture and structure often affect student temperament and their chances to learn (Hawley & Neito, 2010). Therefore, establishing positive relationships between teacher and student, which incorporates a student's culture is equivalent to mirroring the values and beliefs of a student's family (Willis, 1995). Establishing a culturally responsive school facilitates changing behaviors rather than fixing perspectives and theory (Hawley & Nieto, 2010a).

## **Research Design**

In May of 2011, I had several informal conversations with the five potential participants from Daniel Preschool about my study on culturally responsive pedagogy. Then, I followed up with the potential participants in September, 2011 and began informal observations. In January 2012, participants interested in the study were secured. The selection of the participants was based on the researcher's informal observations of the teacher's interactions between their students within the classroom. Five participants indicated that they were interested in joining the research, but needed a description of the study. Four of the five participants agreed to partake in the study; one respondent indicated that personal issues at home and an increased amount of work at school prevented her participation in the research.

This qualitative case study used action research and participatory perspective. Qualitative research includes the collection of classroom observations, instructional artifacts, and interviews and follows up conversations (Miles & Haberman, 1994). Through the use of interviews and classroom observations, I collected data from the participants in their natural settings to provide rich descriptions of their theory in use (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Creswell, 2007, 2009). The case study utilized six sources of data such as documents, archival files, interviews, observations, participant-observations, and tangible artifacts (Yin, 2003). I utilized this type of strategy to investigate the experiences of the participants that may not otherwise appear evident (Yin, 2003). The use of action research provided an essential advantage for identifying the problem and then utilizing the findings to improve teacher practices within the classroom. The theoretical framework also utilized culturally relevant theory as a means of creating an

equitable learning environment by formulating cultural responsiveness as a means of helping culturally diverse students excel within school. Culturally relevant theory establishes a framework to support my argument and justification of the importance of incorporating culturally responsive teaching to help improve student engagement. Implementing multicultural education is used within this study because it lines up with the philosophy of conducting qualitative research particularly utilizing action research to create social change (Shujaa, 1998). The intent of exploring culturally responsive teaching was to establish positive social change through action research. Observations, one-on-one taped interviews, and professional development workshops were used to help the study develop. The use of action research was an essential piece in helping the study unfold and provide a meaningful approach for social change.

Although, this qualitative case study did not focus completely on the reasoning behind positive versus negative teacher-student interactions, it sought to impact the students' learning environment. The study explored the major contrast between all of the participants and the ways in which they interacted with their students. Therefore, examining and utilizing marginalized students' culture as a formal knowledge base sought to impact student success.

Through utilizing the theories of scholars it sought to promote change inside and outside of the classroom (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Nieto, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). In addition, the theories helped identify marginalized students' culture as a knowledge base for classroom instruction. The intent of exploring culturally responsive teaching was to establish positive social change through action research. Ultimately this

research attempted to seek out themes connected to marginalized students. Once inequalities and social injustices are identified within the classroom, then reforming teacher practices can begin.

The scholars previously mentioned focused on the deficit of culturally responsive pedagogy using several means of gathering data through qualitative research. The qualitative approach was the appropriate method for presenting any assumptions gathered from this study. The data included, but was not limited to, the collection of teacher lesson plans, written observations of teacher and student interactions, field notes, classroom environment photographs, teaching materials, student assignment pictures, and posted letters for the classroom parent board. I chose qualitative research as a strategy method because of its assumptive nature. Although there are several culturally responsive research studies in elementary and secondary education, there is a gap in literature regarding teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy within early childhood. Qualitative research helped investigate the current teaching practices of four teachers who work in culturally diverse classrooms and how their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy informed their behavior within the classroom. In addition, I also utilized Argyris and Schön (1974) to explore the participants' espoused theory of culturally relevant pedagogy by use of interviews and espoused theory in use through the use of qualitative research. Establishing the participants' espoused theory early in the study and then observing their theory in use helped me make sense of their formal understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy.

## Research Questions

The following research question and accompanying questions guided this study:

1. What role does culture play in teaching urban classrooms for the teachers at Daniel Preschool?
2. How do teachers at Daniel Preschool feel about integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment within an urban preschool classroom?
3. What are early childhood teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching in an urban school classroom?
4. How do the teachers draw upon African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching?
5. In what ways are teachers at Daniel Preschool transforming their current pedagogy?

These questions helped examine current teacher pedagogies within an urban school classroom. The findings from the analysis of current teacher responsive teaching sought to restructure current practices and ensure that cultural aspects of urban students were implemented within classroom instruction through use of specialized professional development workshops.

The chapter is organized into sections that focus on the setting, the participants, and a rationale of research methods that facilitated the exploration of espoused theory and theory in use, that later help me to answer the research questions. At a later point in this chapter, I clarify the trustworthiness and validity of this study.

## **Setting**

The study was conducted at Daniel Preschool in the Fairview section of Empire, New Jersey. The school district is located in a diverse city with a population of 80,000 that includes 17.3% White, 52.3% African American, 0.6% American Indian and Alaska Native, 2.9% Asian, 23% other race, and 3.9% two or more races. This population of people in Empire City also includes 38.6% Hispanic or Latino. Empire City Public School is a community school district that serves students from prekindergarten to twelfth grade. The school district is also a Title I District within the state of New Jersey. Title I schools are defined as having 35% of their students enrolled as poor or the percentage of poor children in the school is equal to or greater than the percent of poor children district wide (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). Under the NCLB Act, these disadvantaged students have access to equal and fair opportunities for obtaining a quality education (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). The K-12 district was established in the late 1800s with approximately 19,000 students attending 19 elementary schools, two middle schools, two traditional high schools, two magnet high schools, and an alternative high school.

Daniel Preschool's mission focuses on a school facility that services the social, emotional, and scholastic needs of students. The school, a new "state of the art" facility, is located in the Fairview section of Empire, New Jersey. The 81,800-square foot school consists of 37 classrooms for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students with and without disabilities with a total enrollment of 456 students. There are six self-contained Preschool disabilities classrooms, 32 general education pre-kindergarten classrooms, and five general education kindergarten classrooms. The school has classrooms for music, art

instruction, and 10 additional small group instruction spaces for specialized programs. It also includes a cafeteria with a kitchen, a gymnasium/multipurpose room with a maximum capacity of 150 students, a media center, and occupational/physical therapy space. The population of students is 91% African American which makes up 365 of the student population, 8% Hispanic, and 1% other for a total enrollment of 456 students.

The staff consists of 76% African American, 20% Hispanic, and 4% Caucasian. Although the majority of the instructional staff consists of a large number of African American teachers, there is still an absence of culturally responsive instructional techniques in the classroom. The notion is that African American teachers are equipped to instruct African American students. However, the most difficult tasks that all teachers face working in urban classrooms is their use of communication and its limits when deciphered across social differences, gender, class lines, race, and unbalanced use of power (Delpit, 2006).

The mission of the school is to provide students with various learning opportunities with the assistance of personnel, learning resources, as well as resources to prepare for future academic challenges. The belief, in regards to the students and the curriculum, utilizes theme based studies of topics to enhance their learning. The school is highly diversified in the student population and emphasizes utilizing cultural sensitivity within the classrooms. However, the sensitivity and importance of incorporating cultural aspects of the students' community, their real-life experiences, and cultural knowledge into the school and classroom is not consistently present. Students appear unified wearing their school uniforms as they walk through the corridors, but close examination of teacher to student relationships revealed lack of culturally responsive approaches. For instance, I

observed participants, who excluded students from classroom celebrations because of different cultures and religious beliefs instead of modifying the activities.

## **Participants**

The research relied upon experiences of teachers who utilized a formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy practices at Daniel Preschool in the Fairview section of Empire, New Jersey. The study focused on the current pedagogical practices of four middle class female teachers who teach pre-kindergarten and kindergarten in a predominately African American school environment. The rationale for the selection of these participants was based on teacher interest, knowledge of the topic, and feedback regarding knowledge of culturally responsive teaching. Patton (1990) describes this type of selection process as purposeful sampling typically used for qualitative research. My logic of utilizing purposeful sampling was based on a selection of a small of teachers rather than the entire staff. The use of purposeful sampling coincided with addressing the research questions through case study research. I utilized purposeful sampling to help explore teacher's daily instructional practices. The selection of four participants allowed me to focus on a small group of teachers while gaining factual data through prolonged classroom observations, participant interviews, follow up conversations, collection of classroom lesson plans, artifacts, and professional development workshops. Consideration was given to participants with less than three years of service at this particular school and use of instructional and cultural responsive practices with a diverse population of students. Teachers with less than three years of experience at this school were seen as having a higher probability of implementing change because of their unfamiliarity with the culture of the school. These candidates,

however, were also very susceptible to the concept of revamping current pedagogy for implementing change. These factors established the criteria for teacher selection and format for addressing the research questions.

The four participants entered the study with prior teaching experience in an urban school from another district. Three of the four teachers possessed Master's degrees in education and P-3 certification with the exception of the Kindergarten teacher who possessed a Bachelor's degree and K-8 Certification. The race of the participants included two Caucasian teachers and two African American teachers of which one grew up in the city where she currently teaches (See Table 1, Appendix A). The participants all identified with middle class social status and stated that they never participated in a study that focused on fostering culturally responsive pedagogy among a diverse population of students. The following are succinct profiles on each teacher. Pseudonym names were used to disguise the participant's identity.

**Ms. Kelly.** One of the more common themes of the participants was the history of their background, which included for some growing up in urban environments and how each participant evolved into teaching. Ms. Kelly, the youngest of four children in her family, was raised in a suburban neighborhood within New Jersey. She made the choice to become a teacher while in sixth grade. Ms. Kelly described her sixth grade teacher, as having the most impact, as the only African American female teacher that she identified woman who taught in a predominantly White school. Ms. Kelly finds teaching rewarding, especially kindergarten when a student begins to read. Ms. Kelly has only taught in an urban school district. Ms. Kelly stated that she adjusts her pedagogy according to the

needs of her students and if real learning takes place it is because the educators are able to relate to their students.

Ms. Kelly described herself as an educator who believes that sensitivity towards social class takes precedence over culture when you compare urban and suburban students. She was raised in a suburban middle-income status. Ms. Kelly strives to integrate her students' culture through various activities such as celebrations, classroom assignments, and books. It appears that Ms. Kelly values her students' culture and makes adjustments to the classroom environment when warranted. The initial interview and interaction with Ms. Kelly illustrated an authoritative teacher who expected only the best from both students and parents. A divorcee and mother of two children, Ms. Kelly talked about how she initially began teaching in a suburban school, but soon left and found her calling to teach in Empire school district.

**Mrs. Benson.** My first impression of Mrs. Benson was that she was excellent in meeting deadlines and seemed to look forward to new challenges especially when relating to student growth. Mrs. Benson's commitment often reminded me of why good teachers are assets and needed in urban school districts. Mrs. Benson was born and raised in West Fairview, Pennsylvania, an urban neighborhood, where she grew up with three other siblings and attended a private school with predominately White students and a mixture of other cultures. During the course of her determining her career, Mrs. Benson was faced with care giving for her mother and was not able to work a full time job, so decided to open a day care within her home. It was during this time that Mrs. Benson found her passion for teaching and shaping new minds. Upon completion of her Master's degree and teaching certification, she found employment within an urban school district.

Mrs. Benson described her prior knowledge of teaching urban students as minimal. She believes that while teachers learn about their students, the student in return learns about the teacher's ethnicity as well. She described her pedagogy as a multifaceted description that considers various issues of her students such as working single mothers and fathers, siblings raising siblings, hunger, and bullying. As an educator, she values parents as well as her relationship with her students. Mrs. Benson stated that her students trusting and feeling safe within her classroom was also an important part of her pedagogy.

**Ms. Duncan.** Ms. Duncan was born in Birmingham, Alabama and she grew up in a predominately urban area where many opportunities were not available to her, such as resources for encouraging the "Gifted and Talented Program." Ms. Duncan was a part of this program from first grade to twelfth grade. Her struggles in college ultimately caused her to switch her major from Biology to a double major in Sociology and Criminology. Although, Ms. Duncan originally desired to become a FBI agent, she opted for Teach for America. Teach for America is a highly competitive force within education that focuses on recruiting teachers for low-income urban school areas.

Ms. Duncan's background in teaching began in an urban school district. Her teaching beliefs included focusing on student success for all students regardless of race or socioeconomic status. The framework for her philosophy of teaching gives consideration of social class, impoverished areas, and high unemployment, especially in the city where her students live. Her pedagogy considers the student and parent partnership with the school.

**Mrs. Benet.** Mrs. Benet originates from Empire City and is the only participant that teaches in the city where she also lives. Mrs. Benet, the oldest of three children was greatly influenced by her grandmother. Her grandmother instilled in her the importance of education by establishing a “Wall of Fame” in her house. On the “Wall of Fame” were pictures of family members who had graduated from high school and most importantly college. Mrs. Benet dropped out of school at just 15 years old and a short time later enrolled in a preparation program and received her G.E.D. Mrs. Benet currently holds her Master’s degree and became a teacher to give back to the community where she also resides.

Mrs. Benet’s teaching experience includes primarily Hispanic students within urban districts. She believes that effective classroom structure builds a strong foundation of consistency among students. One of the greatest attributes that this teacher has is her familiarity of the school’s neighborhood. It appeared that out of all the participants, Mrs. Benet demonstrated a strong investment in her students’ success based on her knowledge of their struggles growing up in an urban area. My initial impression of Mrs. Benet was that she appeared very gentle and laid back in her demeanor, particularly with her students.

The data gathered and analyzed from the study demonstrated inconsistencies from my participants’ initial answers compared to the classroom observations. I decided that the action research of the study would support the transformation of teachers pedagogical rather than fix their perspectives (Hawley & Nieto, 2010b). The methodology of this study depended heavily on investigating, implementing, and finally supporting change to organize new thinking among teachers regarding pedagogy.

## **Data Collection Methods**

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was filed on May 9, 2011 and approved on May 25, 2011 for the purpose of conducting research on fostering culturally responsive pedagogy in an urban school. Approval for this proposal was received through Rowan University's Institutional Review Board, Empire City's Board of Education, and the district building principal. Each group received a detailed proposal of the intended study. The outline of the study, as reviewed by the institutional review board, did not subject any human being especially children to any harm. In addition, the review process informed the board of education of the time frame (i.e., 10 month school calendar) of the cost to the board, and of the written consent from the building principal within the district. Informed consent forms for the study participants outlining measures for ensuring confidentiality of data and questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of this study (Appendices B and C). The instruments for facilitating and gathering data utilized interview and observation protocols. In addition, four action research cycles were utilized to establish the problem and then move the study towards implementing a change model. Participants who served as teachers were interviewed utilizing set criteria (Appendix D) and moved forward in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I concluded with the process of selection of teachers by meeting with each teacher to secure written consent forms explaining the details of the study. The consent forms outlined the selection process, protection of rights of participants, and the type of data to be collected. Each teacher of the study gave written permission for taping each interview.

## **Teacher Interviews**

I employed the use of unstructured interview protocol with open-ended questions prior to the study beginning in January 2012 (See Appendix D). A review of the previous literature informed the design of the teacher interviews. The interviews were constructed to elicit responses from participants that focused primarily on African American students as the subjects and not the object of the study (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). The interviews also sought to establish a conversation with a purpose that would represent authentic experiences of the participants (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). The rationale for using unstructured interviews was to allow the researcher explore the each participants responses to the interview questions. The purpose of utilizing interviews was used to gather information from the participants, not easily observed (Merriam, 1988). Interviews within this study were used to explore the participants' perspective (Patton, 1990). Yin (2003) describes interviews as an important origin for case study information. The interviews within this case study were unstructured, which allow space for flexibility of responses. By allowing room for flexibility, I was able to do more inquiry, and follow up to questions (Yin, 2003). A taped recording of all interviews was used and later transcribed for analysis. Each participant of the case study was asked to participate in the interview guided by an established protocol. A participant profile sheet (Table 1, Appendix A) was established from the initial interview to determine appropriateness of each participant.

## **Classroom Observations**

I constructed a two-part culturally responsive protocol observation protocol that examined 1) teacher-student interactions and 2) classroom learning environment

(Appendix E). The examination of teacher-student interactions utilized Ladson-Billings (2009a) concept of culturally relevant relations. Ladson-Billings describes culturally relevant teaching regarding teacher-student relations as humane and flexible that extends pass the classroom. The exploration of classroom learning environment used Montgomery (2001) as a framework for exploring the classroom environment. Montgomery (2001) describes culturally responsive classrooms as acknowledging the culture of diverse students. Teachers are responsible for establishing a climate of learning that reflects the culture within their classroom (Montgomery, 2001). This observation protocol helped me explore how teachers were interacting with their students and if evidence of culturally responsiveness was present. Ultimately the data collected from the observations would help me examine the participants' theory in use. I used direct observations from February 2012 to March 2012 within this case study to understand various behaviors of teachers within their classroom environment. The observations ranged from direct to less formal for providing information regarding the topic being studied. The classroom observations for this study took place twice a week for a period of 45 minutes during each visit. The purpose of these observations was to document evidence of culturally responsive pedagogical practices, classroom setting, and the nature and quality of teacher-student activities. Contents of participants' interviews and classroom observations were explored to examine their espoused theory of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Written field notes were taken during the classroom observations to elaborate the researcher's personal thoughts as well as reflections for the next visit. In addition, journaling was utilized to document some of the researcher's concerns or questions that

emerged during classroom visits. The notes from journaling provided the researcher with a venue to vent with unpredictable occurrences such as school fire drills or lock downs that interrupted observation time.

### **Documents and Artifacts**

Artifacts within this study included teachers' lesson plans, parent letters, classroom signs, student artwork, teaching materials, and photographs of classroom learning centers or other pieces of evidence of culturally responsive pedagogy. Physical evidence within this study included teacher lesson plans, teacher curriculum guides, class projects, teacher reflections, classroom bulletin boards, special assemblies, or items brought in by students that represented their culture. All of these collected items served as documentation in exploring teachers' formal understanding regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, the sources of data collected helped address Dimension II (See Table 2, Appendix A) of the observation protocol by examining teacher-student relationships within the classroom.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research was utilized as a strategy to collect data (Craig, 2009). The beginning of the research began with looking at the participant's espoused theory of culturally responsive pedagogy relevant to Cycle I through the use of interviews. The data collected were used as a descriptive source to formulate codes, which later became themes. The outcome of the preliminary planning in Cycle I was to begin "theming the data" (Saldana, 2009). By establishing the participants' espoused theory early in the study and then observing their theory in use, helped me make sense of their formal understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, data obtained from their

theory in Cycle I helped drive Cycles II, III, and IV. I utilized the qualitative method of collecting classroom observations of the teachers' formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, which helped me formulate a plan for implementing change. I utilized other methods for capturing and disseminating data, such as analyzing data, coding, documenting repetitive themes, collecting artifacts, lesson plans, classroom observations, and reflective journaling. The repetitive themes that emerged from the study were grouped and analyzed as well as similar interviews or classroom events within the school. The primary codes included background of teacher, teachers' cultural beliefs, and current teacher philosophy of educating culturally diverse population of students. I coded the data and transcribed repetitive themes from interviews, observations, and professional development workshops by hand. Craig (2009) describes explaining research by creating meaningful categories to explore data. This study utilized similar types of categories to identify and explain data collected from the research. I remained cognizant of the fact that my participants' responses may have been premeditated in order to produce expected answers to interview questions. Therefore, utilizing data from interviews, observations, and professional development workshops helped me construct themes linked to the theories in this research.

The analysis of data for implementing the change initiative first began by exploring classroom observations and teacher-student interactions. The teachers selected for the study were asked several questions regarding their level of education, number of years teaching in education, prior knowledge of teaching African American students, and what qualities their students contributed to the classroom. Each taped interview was transcribed and member checked for accuracy. The information was analyzed to devise a

method to promote more effective practices for culturally responsive teaching. Ladson-Billings (2009a) devised a two-dimension model relative to culturally responsive teaching. The model includes concepts of self and others as well as social relationships. Ladson-Billings (2009a) describes the first part of this model as a contrast between culturally relevant teachers and how teachers view their roles as educators (See Table 2, Appendix A). My research dictated that I focus primarily on Ladson-Billings Dimension II as part of my analysis. The second part of the model focuses on the way teachers establish social relationships with their students within their classroom as well as the surrounding community (See Table 2, Appendix A). Dimension II of Ladson-Billings (2009a) two dimension model was utilized to explore teacher-student relations embedded within instructional practices by infusing students cultural background and ethnic experiences into their class time to help them encourage a community of learners. The second part of the model was also utilized during the professional development workshops to help participants write their own literacy biography. I utilized transcription of interviews, written field notes, coding, member checking, and data collection from classroom observations. The interview question protocol and observation tool were used to capture data regarding teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding culturally responsive pedagogy to determine the extent of their knowledge and the need for implementing strategies.

According to past research, teachers building healthy and positive relationships with their students saw an increased rate of classroom participation, improved peer relationships, increased positivity about school, and fewer behavior concerns (Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002). Reflective journaling was utilized after interaction with

participants. Dewey (1933) describes reflective journaling as a means to exploring the researcher's experience and new learning during the research process. I also used reflective journaling to examine my growth as a researcher, leader, and facilitator.

### **Data Reduction**

Data collected from this study included observations, interviews, field notes, and various artifacts from four case reports. Data were analyzed to construct themes that manifested during the study and established teachers' beliefs that formulated their pedagogy. There were several commonalities among the participants as it related to infusing culturally responsive teaching within the classroom and lack of cultural awareness. These examples came directly from data taken from the four participants. Each case contained an autobiography of each participant. The descriptions included behaviors displayed by the teachers and an examination of the classroom environment as it related to the students' cultural background. In addition to the autobiographies, information presented in the study was drawn by the researcher from interviews, observations made by the researcher, and analysis of documents and artifacts. The cases were described in random order.

The formulation of case studies during the months of February and March 2012 focused on teacher-student interactions. In addition, I also focused on my own subjective perspectives on fostering culturally responsive teaching in an urban school. Hence, my own experiences came from teaching in only urban schools, which established my beliefs regarding integrating students' culture into the curriculum. There were times during the study that I felt that I believed I had some of the answers to the research questions because of my background working in urban schools. The goal of this study was not to

critique teachers but to objectively understand how teachers integrated their students' culture into meaningful lessons, impacted on each student, and their environment. Each reported case was introduced independently to establish a simplistic framework for reading. Included within each case were observations that narrated the degree of how each teacher fostered culturally responsive teaching within their classrooms. The method that I used for data analysis and reduction utilized four of Gay's (2002) framework for theory of culturally responsive teaching.

### **Coding**

Several coding strategies were explored for examining the content of the data gathered from the research. Establishing a start list of codes prior to fieldwork as well as patterns helped during the collection of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My start list of codes evolved from the use of Ladson-Billings Dimension II, social relations between teacher and student (See Table 2, Appendix A). I utilized this process to connect the data relevant to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes were formulated utilizing terms associated with the collection of data. In addition, codes were established for participants who prior to the study stated that they had a strong understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, but during the course of the fieldwork demonstrated less formal knowledge. The less formal knowledge originated from the participants' espoused theory (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Data collected derived from the research questions, observations of classroom setting, and the nature and quality of teacher-initiated interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This collection of data ultimately helped identify the participants' theory in use.

Throughout this process a defined purpose of coding was constructed to utilize the start list to create patterns. There were several visible concepts from the literature review that were directly linked to the codes. These codes focused on primarily teacher-student relationships and a consciousness classroom environment that reflected diversity. This method was utilized to help place data into established groups. Several of Gays (2000) culturally relevant theory categories were utilized to examine the participant's growth during the professional workshops. These categories included validation, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowerment, transformative, and emancipatory. The conclusion of all the data connected back to the overarching research questions and the subtopics.

### **Rationale of Research Methods**

**Qualitative method.** The rationale for utilizing a qualitative, case study, and action research strategy was to examine teachers' formal knowledge regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy through the collection of rich descriptive data that would help address research questions. Qualitative research is one approach that allowed me to capture data from teachers in the natural setting of their classrooms. Qualitative research functions under a premise of documenting peoples' beliefs, actual behaviors, and establishes themes (Creswell, 2007); coding analysis of data while investigating emerging patterns (Craig, 2009), and studying a small set of people (Maxwell, 2004). The use of qualitative research within this research design included a series of methods to explore and interpret the data such as utilizing research questions, analyzing the social problem, and interviewing participants as a means of inquiry. I selected a qualitative study as a strategy of inquiry for understanding the problem, exploring assumptions of a teacher's pedagogy, interpreting data, and for the availability

of structure for further implications for future research (Creswell, 2007). I used this approach because it would provide rich data that could be examined to establish a strong framework for advancing change and perhaps lead to further discussion of its impact on early childhood. Data were drawn from interviews, observations, and classroom artifacts such as teacher lesson plans and photographs of culturally diverse posters. Additional data came from learning materials, which included puzzles, reading books, and survey and response sheets from professional development workshops.

In a review of pertinent literature on assessing diversity, Garcia and Pearson (1994) discuss numerous concerns of delivering fair education among diverse populations and if assessment helps improve current conditions. I selected qualitative action research to establish a stance of inquiry to explore the problem of instructional practices and theory of action at Daniel Preschool, record extensive information of the problem, and then seek a feasible result for improving instructional practices to positively impact students. Kurt Lewin (1951), one of the first to employ an understanding of action research, describes it as examining the environment through the use of various inquiries that result in improvement. The core of this study was crafted around how culture could be incorporated into the classroom environment and teaching on a daily basis. An analysis of teaching practices, school curriculum, and the teacher-student interactions were all a part of establishing solutions to the problem through use of action research (Schmidt, 2004; Shujaa, 1998). The research questions were designed to guide the researcher with gathering information regarding teacher beliefs and practices utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Case study strategy.** I selected a case study approach as a means to explore how teachers utilize classroom structure to promote culturally responsive pedagogy. Yin (2003) defines case study research as an investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Specifically, this approach was selected to answer why and how questions in a natural setting. Through examination of current teacher practices, the intent was to transform their instructional practices through professional development workshops.

The case study approach is described as a research strategy that contributes to a body of knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, related phenomenon, multiple uses of data collection, and instrumental in helping the observer understand the natural constructs of classroom environments (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). This case study research focuses on a smaller data set of participants while informing the growth of each individual involved in the study. This research strategy best supports the rationale for my selection of four early childhood teachers. The research explored the perceptions and experiences these teachers who incorporated students' culture/experience into their teaching techniques. I incorporated the case study strategy as a means of focusing on the daily instructional techniques of the four participants.

**Case study unit of analysis.** Utilizing case study approach was vital for addressing the condition of instructional practices in Daniel Preschool. There is a need to better understand the why and how of teachers' pedagogical stance in their classrooms. Merriam (1988) describes case study research as meaningful when the unit of analysis of the study is identified. The unit of analysis in this study is the findings from the

classroom environment and teacher-student interactions of the four teachers. Case study research is appropriate for this study as I seek to reveal the outcomes of four teachers' pedagogical approaches in the classroom. The methodological approach attempts to understand the nature and interactions between teacher and students in their natural school setting.

Yin (2003) describes analyzing case study evidence as using any of the five different approaches: (a) pattern matching, (b) explanation building, (c) time-series analysis, (d) logic models, and (e) cross-case synthesis. Yin (2003) describes the use of analyzing several pieces of data as depending on more than one data source to further interpret findings. Therefore, using Yin's (2003) method of pattern-matching is appropriate for the investigation of cultural responsive approaches used by the four teachers in this study.

**Action research.** Action research is described as a method for improving and facilitating change particularly among classroom practices (Craig, 2009), contributing to the solution of future problems and reaching truth (Corey, 1954), forming theories and impacting change (Argyris and Schön, 1974), and establishing, implementing, and reflecting on a plan in cyclical stages (Kemmis, 1982). Action research was utilized as a strategy within this study to help establish change among instructional practices in urban early childhood classrooms. I examined instructional methods of teachers with established pedagogies for working with culturally diverse populations within their classrooms. Action research allowed me to examine the current understanding of culture and then utilize cyclical research to facilitate improvement within classroom practices.

Examinations of the various types of instructional techniques of early childhood teachers were used to better understand the impact of culturally responsive practices.

Proactive and reactive research processes were conducted to examine classroom teachers' instructional practices. As a participant-researcher, I immersed myself in the natural environment of the participants' classrooms to collect data. Once I identified the problem of teachers' lack of culturally instructional practices through the use of informal classroom observations, which included teacher-student interactions and examination of classroom artifacts and interviews, then I was prepared to facilitate strategies through a reactive approach. The reactive process included identifying the problem, collecting data, analyzing data, and then establishing a plan of action to facilitate change. The plan of action stemmed from the cyclical process of collection and analysis of data. The purpose of establishing an action plan was three dimensional for the research: (1) creating positive change, (2) drawing conclusions, and (3) presenting findings to enhance instructional classroom practices (Craig, 2009). The use of action research allowed me to identify problems of classroom instructional practices, present findings, and implement possible changes through the use of professional development workshops.

The rationale for using qualitative, case study, and action research was to undergird the research design. This approach allowed me to find answers to my "why and how questions" within a naturalistic setting (Baxter & Jack, 2008). These three strategies allowed me to gather a substantial amount of data from various sources, which established a rich description of the data. Furthermore, the data gathered established a framework for planning and implementing a change model.

## **Evaluation of Action Research Cycles**

Action research within this study is cyclical and self-reflective in nature as it addresses circumstances in order to promote social change in instructional practices within an early childhood school and the ways in which transformation of practices take place (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The aim of action research in this study is to move from identifying the problem, through inquiry, collection and analysis of data, and then using findings to implement sound change (Craig, 2009). The action research in this study consists of four cycles. The cycles help to identify the stages of change and provide direction for implementing approaches for transforming teachers' pedagogical stance. Action research gives the researcher opportunities to use self-reflection in each cycle that will help to impact future cycles.

**Phase analysis.** During this preliminary phase the dominant weakness, the lack of cultural responsive pedagogical approaches within Daniel preschool was illustrated based on an internal scan and informal observations as well as criteria for selecting participants. As the participant researcher, I understood the workload and constraints of teachers' time during the school year. I established a criterion for the study to ensure each participant's appropriateness as well as make sure each participant would be able to commit to the duration of the study. During this phase, I established a criteria of participant selection questionnaire (See Appendix C) which included teachers with less than three years' experience working at Daniel Preschool, formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, not currently enrolled in a graduate program, comfortable with action research and their colleague observing and exploring their classroom environment, observing their interactions among students, and a desire to implement change in instructional practices

through scheduled professional development workshops at the school. The rationale for selecting participants of less than three years of experience at their current school was to ascertain higher probability of implementing change. Also, offering professional development credits to the participants not enrolled in a credit bearing graduate program increased the probability of a participant remaining in the study to its completion.

Through my informal observations of teachers regarding their formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, I began a draft of possibilities for implementing change once the participants for the study were selected.

The data collected were analyzed through the use of a theoretical lens. I employed the use of scholars and culturally relevant theory as a way to explore the lack of cultural responsiveness of early childhood teachers. I used each of these scholars within the action research part of the study. Nieto (2000) and Delpit (2006) allowed me to explore each participant's stance on culturally responsive pedagogy. King (1994) and Shujaa (1998) helped support the concept of using students' culture as a knowledge base. Ogbu (1992), Banks (1999), and Souto-Manning & Mitchell (2010) supported my use of multicultural education and as creating an equitable learning environment. Therefore, it was vital to use the theoretical framework and culturally relevant theory to examine the lack of culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Although, I began with a start list of codes that helped inform my preliminary phase of what I was interested in researching, the analysis of data and themes that emerged helped establish a final phase of analysis.

During this time I organized data from the study into a codebook pertinent to my study.

**Cycle I.** Once information had been gathered from the preliminary phase in Cycle I, time slots were established for teachers to conduct unstructured interviews as a form of

data collection to obtain data regarding use of cultural competencies, background data to formulate a teacher biography, and integration of cultural practices within the classroom. A part of utilizing unstructured interviews was to gather information regarding the participants' espoused theory. Argyris and Schön (1974) describe theory in practice as preferred practices that provide theory in actions. I utilized Argyris and Schön's (1974) concept to allow the participants to identify their theory of instructional practices prior to the beginning of the study. I felt it necessary to allow the participants' voice to be heard within their espoused theory. I utilized action research within a two-month time frame during the school year. The action research was utilized to explore better methods for informing teacher practices within urban classrooms. Each cycle consisted of the participation of the teachers and the researcher. The use of action research during this study helped establish change among instructional practices in early childhood classrooms that ranged from Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten. In addition, I initially used taped interviews with the participants to help identify their espoused theory in Cycle I. Using the identified dominant problem of the school helped propose a plan of action. The proposed plan was to help transform teachers' current pedagogical stance.

After the issue was identified within the school during the preliminary phase in Cycle I, the building principal gave permission to hold six professional workshops after school in the library. The consensus among the participants was that Wednesday was a good day to meet since staff meetings were held on Mondays and other committees utilized the library on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The purpose for establishing professional workshops was to help teachers reflect on their classroom pedagogy for early childhood students. The workshops were also designed to evoke discussions about cultural

understanding. I decided early on in the study that I would not critique teachers' instructional style, verbally make, and offer comments or suggestions. I allowed the illustration of the observations, feedback from the participants, and discussion from the initial professional development workshops to help drive the discussion for future workshops. My desire and role for establishing professional development workshops was to help address ambiguity among participants regarding their formal understanding of culturally responsive teaching and to help impact their current pedagogy in relation to their students' culture. The true value of implementing professional development workshops was to increase adult learning among teachers in a meaningful way as well as establish collaborative learning among teachers. Knowles (1984) states that adult learners such as teachers should partner with other colleagues to collaborate and take responsibility for their own learning. The truth was that all teachers have pedagogy regardless if they never document or verbalize it.

The building school principal was more than happy to assist me with utilizing school space for the workshops with one condition; I had to open it up to the entire school. I have to admit that I found that request somewhat uncomfortable as I was not sure how it would impact the openness and integrity I had vigorously worked to establish with the participants. During one of the school's morning announcements, the reality of my study began to surface with hearing it spoken on the intercom system. Somehow hearing my proposed professional development workshops blaring over the intercom helped me to quickly take a stand on thinking as a school leader, reflecting, and preparing myself to address culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Cycle II.** Based on the issues identified in Cycle I, Cycle I helped inform Cycle II by influencing reflective practices, interviews, and observation protocols. One of the purposes of this cycle was to begin exploring ideas for developing a plan based on the dominant problem within the school and then follow through with a course of action through the methods for gathering data. Ultimately the data collected from classroom observations, journaling, and field notes would help illustrate how the participants' pedagogy transformed to their current theory in use. During the following weeks of Cycle II, I determined what the study needed and solidified the protocol for classroom observations of teacher practices, exploring teaching concepts within the participants' lesson plans, which helped formulate a list of themes for further examination. Thematic codes were established to help analyze the raw data captured during future observations (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002).

**Cycle III.** Cycle III consisted of obtaining multiple forms of data such as documenting classroom observations, interviewing participants, and utilizing data such as photographs to inform the rest of the study. Through reflection, documenting field and journaling notes of concerns that stemmed during the study, the data were recorded for analysis of the action plan. In addition, the collection of classroom observations, photographs of cultural diversified artifacts of the students within the classrooms, and field notes were utilized in this cycle. Cycle III also included creating a more defined plan of action based on the observations to help establish professional development workshops to facilitate dialogue among participants and researcher regarding working with diverse populations of students.

**Cycle IV.** The four teachers who agreed to participate in the study also agreed to attend six professional development workshops. I chose professional development workshops as a means for implementing change for three reasons: (1) the New Jersey Department of Education requires teachers to enhance their learning with 20 hours of documented professional development each school year to support students learning, (2) qualities of early childhood education has been heightened as a result of the NCLB Act of 2001, and (3) professional development for early childhood educators requires strong detailed methods for delivering information by presenters with empirical knowledge (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). In addition, providing professional development workshops is a great method for evoking discussion and engaging teachers regarding pedagogical concerns. Professional development workshops prove powerful when connecting theory and practice within teachers' pedagogical practices (Yaffe & Maskit, 2010). Knowles (1984) states that teachers who partner with other colleagues take responsibility for their own learning.

The Professional Development workshops began at 3:05 p.m. and lasted no more than 45 minutes. I had to maintain and voice my sense of flexibility within this role since I knew that the students in our building were normally picked up by parents at 3:00-3:15 p.m. although dismissal was at 2:45 p.m. I was cognizant that being able to engage teachers began with demonstrating kindness, understanding, and flexibility. I reassured the teachers that I would wait a few minutes before beginning the workshops. Prior to the workshops, I supplied each participant with a binder to hold articles pertaining to culturally responsive pedagogy, titles of all the workshops, and future PowerPoint slides. Teachers were also given a journal to help document reflections, questions, or concerns.

During each workshop, I supplied light refreshments as a way to help participants relax after a long day and more importantly a chance to talk to other participants while signing in and gathering materials. The workshops developed from my analysis of previous cycles and how the participants' formal knowledge of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy were non-congruent with the theory of Geneva Gay. The culturally responsive workshops focused on six sub titles used in each handout. The subtitles included:

Understanding Culture

Knowing Thyself & Others

Understanding Other Peoples Children

Becoming A Culturally Responsive Educator

Taking a Stance

Supporting Change

The initial professional development workshop titled "Understanding Culture" utilized three books to evoke a discussion on empathy such as "Visiting Day, Shelter in my Car, and Heather has two moms." This part of the workshop described and introduced Ruggiano-Schmidt and Finkbeiner's (2006) ABC model, which focused on the chapter knowing thyself and understanding others. In addition, teachers kept a journal to document entries about preliminary discussions regarding some of their experiences. Preselected articles on diversity were read by the participants prior to meetings, which evoked discussion about connecting a teacher's classroom philosophy to their students. Participants completed an autobiography of their life as well as one of their students to help them begin to think about their own beliefs regarding culture.

The final two professional development workshops demonstrated, engaged, and encouraged teachers to take and support a stance on cultural responsive pedagogy. The six-step change model of Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) encouraged participants to take a stance on cultural responsive pedagogy for directing school improvement. This particular six step model focused on diagnosing the current situation, developing a vision for change, gaining commitment to the vision, developing an action plan, implementing change, and assessing and reinforcing change (Beer et al. 1990).

The elements of Cycle IV included observations of implemented change within classrooms, field notes, journaling, as well as participants working independently and collectively to provide feedback from previous meetings regarding their reflections of implementing changes to their current pedagogical instruction and interaction with their students. A part of this transformation included several basic steps towards making a positive difference within the classroom (Finkbeiner & Koplín, 2002; Schmidt, 1998, as cited as cited in Ruggiano-Schmidt, 2006). The steps included: 1) a written autobiography of each participant, 2) each participant selecting a partner of a different ethnicity or culture, and 3) interviewing them and then focusing on key elements in that person's background (Ruggiano-Schmidt, 2006). This exercise was designed to promote empathy between the participants. By the participants partnering with colleagues of different ethnic backgrounds and sharing personal circumstances of their background, the desire was to connect the experience to their students within their classroom that would help create a positive classroom environment. Finally, the participants compared their autobiographies to the biographies written by their partner during the exercise. This activity is described as cross-cultural analysis and appreciation of differences (Cummins,

1986, Derman-Sparks, 1992; Finkbeiner & Koplin, 2002 ; McCaleb, 1994; ; Spindler & Spindler, 1987; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990, as cited in Ruggiano-Schmidt, 2006). In addition to the feedback gathered from participants, I documented the outcomes of the change initiative and proposed a school wide diversity project on recognizing the students' cultural differences. Transcription of audio recordings and field notes occurred during this cycle. This process included journal notes concerning leadership involvement and decision making strategies. Data analysis and reflection were continuous during this cycle of collection. Also, participants were asked to keep a journal so that they could document their experiences and preliminary discussions.

Because of action research's cyclical nature, Cycles I, II, and III helped inform Cycle IV through the use of organizing the data, interpretation, and presentation of the findings, and reflection. Throughout the action research study, the process of data analysis was used for clarification, development of categories, and utilizing procedures to assure reliability and validity of the findings. Maxwell (2005) describes this procedure as reporting the preliminary results of the study. The data gathered from this cycle helped justify and inform the data analysis part of the study. This qualitative action research achieved its goals at various times during the study. Each participant arrived at different times regarding their own consciousness of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy and taking a stance to integrate students' culture into the curriculum. The study introduced several purposeful research questions that examined each teacher's beliefs, values, understanding, and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. The intent was to explore each teacher's current pedagogy and how it facilitated learning of culturally diverse students. The bigger aim of the study was to

ensure that the students' culture was being implemented within the curriculum and during instructional class time.

Part of reflecting on the effects of implementing a plan of action involved discussion during the professional development workshops that examined responses of educators who experienced positive feedback from students when culturally responsive pedagogy was utilized within the classroom. The professional development workshops, which asked participants to complete a biography on one student, yielded positive results, as they came to learn about their student. When educators learned more about their students' interests and home environment, the teachers were able to identify more refined methods of integrating students' culture into the curriculum. This section correlated to the literature overview relevant to social inequality of minorities in the United States particularly the exclusions of culture and diversity classes within teacher preparation programs.

**Final phase analysis.** The final phase of analysis used previous classroom observations and professional development workshops. Based on the information that was presented during the workshops the participants agreed that their current knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy was limited and that further concepts regarding integrating their students' culture needed further discussion. The teachers began to examine their own lens for understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. The participants' current teaching practices had shown them that there was "something missing" in their classrooms and that at times their attempts to include other cultures were demonstrated within the classroom environment but not directly embedded within

their lessons. The participants realized that their lack of culturally responsive pedagogy unknowingly helped embrace racism within their classrooms.

Culturally relevant theory helped the participants to self-evaluate and question their current pedagogy. For example, the teachers initially rejected that their previous knowledge was incorrect or needed to be “unloaded and then reloaded” with the correct information. However, classroom routines formulated within traditional teaching norms do not create an equitable learning environment that acknowledges cultural responsiveness as a means of educating culturally diverse students. During this study participants were asked in the middle of the study to assess the cultural competency of their classroom and this analysis looked at cultural classroom visuals, daily schedule, encouraging interpersonal interactions, understating of their students cultural ways of thinking, acting and believing, interactional style, instructional strategies for cognitive styles, and instructional designs. Ultimately the themes that were developed from this research were a catapult for implications for future research.

During the final phase of analysis I began to see that participants had perhaps unknowingly excluded culture from their teaching practices and focused exclusively on concepts and subject matter. In addition, some of the participants believed because of their student’s age and grade level they would not comprehend or retain cultural concepts. The context of public schools do not willingly incorporate student culture at the preschool level, hence continuing to embrace institutional racism and the impact it has on student success.

## **Instrumentation**

A part of my action research strategy involved the use of several research instruments to help establish reliability. Craig (2009) describes reliability within action research as the level of consistency of tools utilized to collect data. The method that I used to address problems of teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy was through use of Creswell's (2007) observation and interview protocol that examined the classroom setting and the nature and quality of interactions among teacher and student. The basis for utilizing Creswell's observation and interview tool were based on a prior study by Asmussen and Creswell (1995). I used a culturally responsive study observation protocol to explore teacher-student interactions and classroom learning environment. The examination of teacher-student interactions utilized Ladson-Billings (2009a) concept of culturally relevant social relations. Ladson-Billings describes culturally relevant teaching regarding teacher-student relations as humane and flexible that extends past the classroom (See Table 2, Appendix A). The exploration of classroom learning environment used Montgomery (2001) as a framework for exploring the participant's instructional classroom environment. Montgomery (2001) describes culturally responsive classrooms as acknowledging the culture of diverse students.

Through the use of action research I examined current actions of teachers' pedagogy with a proposed plan for implementing change. Within this study I identified the problem through informal inquiry. The identification of problems helped craft my research questions within the study. The research questions then influenced the shape of the research design, which included qualitative research, case study, and action research.

Action research within this study attempted to help solve a realistic problem and improve educational practices (Corey, 1954). Craig (2009), describes six steps of action research cycles for moving through the action research process: (1) identifying the problem related to the work environment, (2) designing the questions based on issue, (3) aligning the questions and data, (4) implementing the study, collection and analysis of data, (5) designing the action plan, and (6) identifying success and change. The practical problem was identified prior to the beginning of the research. The use of Craig's (2009) action research description was primarily used as a framework during the preliminary part of the study. The practical problem helped influence the research questions:

1. What role does culture play in teaching in urban classrooms for the teachers at Daniel Preschool?
2. How do teachers at Daniel Preschool feel about integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment within an urban preschool classroom?
3. What are early childhood teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching in urban classrooms?
4. How do the teachers draw upon African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching?
5. In what ways are teachers at Daniel Preschool transforming their current pedagogy?

The action research of this study utilized the practical problem and research questions to collect and analyze data. The completion of an action plan stemmed from initial classroom observations, interviews, and feedback from professional development workshops. The identification of success and change was validated through workshop

activities, professional evaluations of workshops and post classroom observations. Herr and Anderson (2005) utilized a four step process for completing the action research process: (1) planning based on the identified problem, (2) establishing a formal plan for implementation, (3) observing the results of the implemented plan, and (4) reflecting on the process of change for further planning. Herr and Anderson's (2005) description of action research was used to navigate the research that unfolded during the study. The purpose of the cycles identified within this study was to help the reader move from the problem to the proposed change process. Therefore, I utilized Craig (2009) as a starting point for beginning the study and then Herr and Anderson (2005) to help establish and use self-reflection to plan professional development workshops. Utilizing Craig (2005) and Herr and Anderson's (2005) cyclical method, were both appropriate for qualitative action research.

### **Participant Researcher**

The concept of participatory research began with the contributions of Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This document began a series of thematic research projects that helped establish the framework of participatory research. Freire discusses giving a voice to those educators who have no other venue to discuss their concerns. He then describes how giving those oppressed pedagogy of hope through participatory action research. The use of participatory research allows the researcher to collect data from other educators, analyze the data, and propose a plan of social change. This study utilized participatory research in the participants' natural setting. Naturalistic researchers are described as obtaining raw data through methods of participant observation as well as qualitative interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In addition,

Cochran-Smith (2009) describes this type of participatory research as a cultural building process. Over the next several months, I conducted research for this study. My role as researcher allowed me to interact with the participants in their natural work setting. As a participant researcher, I have my own childhood stories of teachers who were not culturally responsive and cared more about the standard based curriculum than connecting to their students' culture. Through the years, public education in the United States has drifted away from celebrating and incorporating students' culture into the curriculum. Education today is focused primarily on meeting state standards and annual yearly performance goals.

Part of each classroom's goals at Daniel Preschool includes supervision by one teacher and one paraprofessional with a ratio of one adult for every seven students. Each Preschool classroom has a maximum of 15 students enrolled and must, by law, always have two adults present. Therefore, during the study because of my absence from my classroom, the participant's paraprofessional had to go and help oversee my classroom until I returned. My role as participant researcher included assuming the role and all duties of a paraprofessional to help assist the teacher while I conducted research within each classroom with the exception of the one Kindergarten teacher, whom I observed during my preparatory time. My role as participant researcher included the duties of the classroom paraprofessional. These duties included picking up late students from the office, assisting students during breakfast, answering the classroom phone, and addressing or answering any questions from staff or parents while the teacher conducted instructional lessons. Much of these paraprofessional duties occurred prior to the teacher's group lesson, which allowed me the opportunity to observe and focus on

collecting data. As a researcher, I was interested in the teachers' instructional practices of urban school students, how teachers dealt with classroom conflict, what messages teachers conveyed by classroom management, and if the classroom environment represented the diversity of the students (Brown, 2003). This research described in detail what I saw and heard within these classrooms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research also presented a means to explore the pedagogy of teachers instructing culturally diverse students. As a researcher, I was interested in how the teachers' background, worldview of their students, and cultural competencies shaped their classroom pedagogy. Therefore as a participant observer, I was not only interested in understanding the interactions between teacher and students, classroom experiences, but in analyzing the collected data from extensive observations.

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of this research utilized several techniques to establish adequacy for qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe establishing trustworthiness of a study through utilizing several techniques: (1) creditability, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) conformability. Creditability was accomplished through the use of prolonged engagement within the classrooms, peer reviews, and member checking to ensure reliable findings. The study also addressed transferability to help answer the research questions of the study. Dependability was utilized to determine if the research would produce the same results particularly exploring Cycle II and Cycle III. The exploration and results of Cycle II and Cycle III produced the same results from the classroom observations. Finally, the rationale for using conformability assured that the findings from the research were pure in reporting and demonstrated no bias from the

researcher. Creditability was used to endure validity. Therefore, utilizing extended observations, peer debriefing, and member checking helped address credibility and valid research.

### **Validity**

Yin (2003) describes four tests relevant to case study approach such as construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. During the research study, I chose two of the four tests, construct validity and reliability. Patton (2002) states that the use of validity and reliability are the main two factors necessary for a qualitative research design. Seale (1999) also states that by using validity and reliability help establish trustworthiness of the research. The use of both tests helped me accomplish my objectives related to the study and allowed me to repeat the same procedures utilizing an observation protocol gaining the same outcomes. The outcomes from using the observation protocol tool were indicative of the teachers' formal understanding regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy.

Yin (2003) describes validity and reliability as important measures relevant to case study research. Validity is the ability to justify research and gauge accuracy of the current research (Craig, 2009). Reliability is the ability to obtain repeated results of a study through the same method of collection (Yin, 2003). Although validity and reliability are essential for case study research, both are not appropriate for qualitative research. According to Stenbacka (2001), utilizing reliability during qualitative research is a strong indicator that the qualitative study is inadequate. Therefore, the rationale to utilize only validity is conducive for this qualitative research. I employed a series of steps within the study to substantiate the trustworthiness and validity of this study such as

prolonged engagement in collecting data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer review or debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), member checking (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), and employing descriptive words to help readers make a connection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Prolonged Engagement**

The use of prolonged engagement in each classroom helped me develop an understanding of the participants' instructional practices in Cycle I, II, and III and illustrate a more valid finding during the study. Prolonged engagement within this study included both informal and formal observations in order to establish a relationship with the participants. It was during the informal observations that I built trust with the participants and formulated a proposed framework for implementing change. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe prolonged engagement as investing ample amount of time in the field to gain a valid understanding of the participants. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of prolonged engagement does not make a distinction between informal and formal observations within research but rather on investing sufficient time. I invested time with the participants outside of the classroom such as attending celebrations after school, working on similar school committees, and sitting together in the cafeteria during staff meetings as part of engaging teachers. These activities allowed me to learn about the culture of each participant, while also checking for any misinformation as a result of my own distortions of the participants' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Engaging with the participants during the school year particularly outside of the classroom gave me a more realistic viewpoint of their character and cultural beliefs. In this study I observed Daniel Preschool teachers' instructional practices during the course of six months. This approach helped with capturing data from observations as well as analyzing data. This prolonged

engagement allowed me to establish a relationship with the participants to complete classroom observations and teacher interviews. The positive aspect of utilizing prolonged engagement facilitated the collection of thick descriptive data and teachers' instructional practices.

### **Peer Review**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe peer review as a form of the research process. This research process employed a device for the honesty of the researcher. During the research study I used several colleagues (i.e., external professors, dissertation cohort members, dissertation advisor) to help me utilize inquiry in different ways in order to better examine other types of research on culturally responsive pedagogy. As a researcher, I protected and maintained confidentiality among the participants and the school principal. Pseudonyms were utilized during discussion of the research with professors.

I utilized three colleagues outside of the school to read through completed data to offer feedback for accuracy. I utilized information from meetings with my dissertation advisor as a form of peer review to help me discuss findings and consider other scholars' perspectives on culturally responsive pedagogy. Therefore, utilizing peer review allowed me to construct a vivid accounting of teachers within their classroom.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is described as the main ingredient for establishing credibility within qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach of establishing credibility included collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data for participant review. During the study, I presented the findings to the participants that materialized from the

data. This process allowed participants to correct, give their perceptions, and insert missing information. This process was necessary for ensuring accuracy, particularly during the transcription of interviews. I transcribed interviews and then emailed them to each participant to member check for errors. Member checking occurred after data collection and follow up with participants materialized throughout the study in order to validate the current findings and answers to the research questions.

## **Conclusion**

This study identified the problem and established a plan through informal observations in Cycle I. The initial identification of the problem helped inform my research questions, unstructured interviews, and observation protocols in Cycle II. This moved the action plan forward, implemented the study, collected, and analyzed data in Cycle III. Finally, this study established workshops for implementing change using professional development in Cycle IV, which was based on findings and reflections from Cycle II and Cycle III.

The intent of the study was to explore teacher practices through the methods of qualitative research. By utilizing qualitative and action research the study sought to examine urban early childhood teachers' formal understandings about culturally responsive teaching, how teachers utilized African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching and transforming teachers' current pedagogy. It was through the use of qualitative research that I saw the illustration of social injustice of students within early childhood classrooms. Therefore, the students in a sense have been "Left Behind" because of the lack of culturally responsive teaching. Reform was needed to reconstruct current pedagogies of teachers' into functioning ones and create a classroom

environment based on caring and concern. The conceptual framework utilized culturally responsive theories as a lens executed through qualitative research for understanding teacher practices in early childhood (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Nieto, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1998; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

Qualitative and action research were utilized to help establish change among instructional practices but also inform research questions of the study. Furthermore, through exploration, the impact of the change initiative promoted effective changes among instructional practices, which helped educators positively impact student success.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results and Findings**

This qualitative research utilized action research to explore the pedagogy of four urban pre-school teachers and the transformative potential of professional development workshops on culturally responsive teaching. Data were analyzed to gain insight into the early childhood teachers' formal understanding of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and the efficacy of professional development workshops. The qualitative analysis consisted of examining teacher beliefs, identifying evidence of practice that incorporated culturally responsiveness based on taped interviews, classroom observations, and the results of professional development.

The qualitative methodology that I used in this study helped formulate the rules of inquiry for data analysis. The analysis of the teachers' current pedagogy helped establish a series of professional development workshops in response to the data I collected from the preliminary phase of planning in Cycle I, Cycle II, Cycle III, and Cycle IV. I facilitated professional development workshops on culturally relevant practices that were constructed from the initial data collection of interviews and classroom observations. The professional development workshops helped transform the participants' current pedagogy that ultimately established a new formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.

In Figure 2, I describe the process of data analysis used in this research. I explored the participants' formal knowledge base through my interactions with them during the initial interviews that depicts their perspectives. The participants' knowledge

base of cultural responsiveness is their prior knowledge before the study. Through the research-participant's interactions, the teachers' perspectives were identified. The initial interviews illustrated the teachers' espoused theory and identified their symbolic teaching stance. I then interacted with the participants during classroom observations that illustrated their theory in use, which revealed their enacted teaching stance. An analysis of the participants' espoused theory and theory in use were utilized to create professional development content. The professional development content was used to transform the participants' current pedagogy. The findings from the professional development workshops and post classroom observations illustrated the participants' new formal understanding and how I categorized their growth according to Gay's (2002) four themes. While I explored the teachers' formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and helped them transform their current pedagogy, study findings indicate that there are implications for future research on the topic of reforming early childhood teachers' pedagogy.

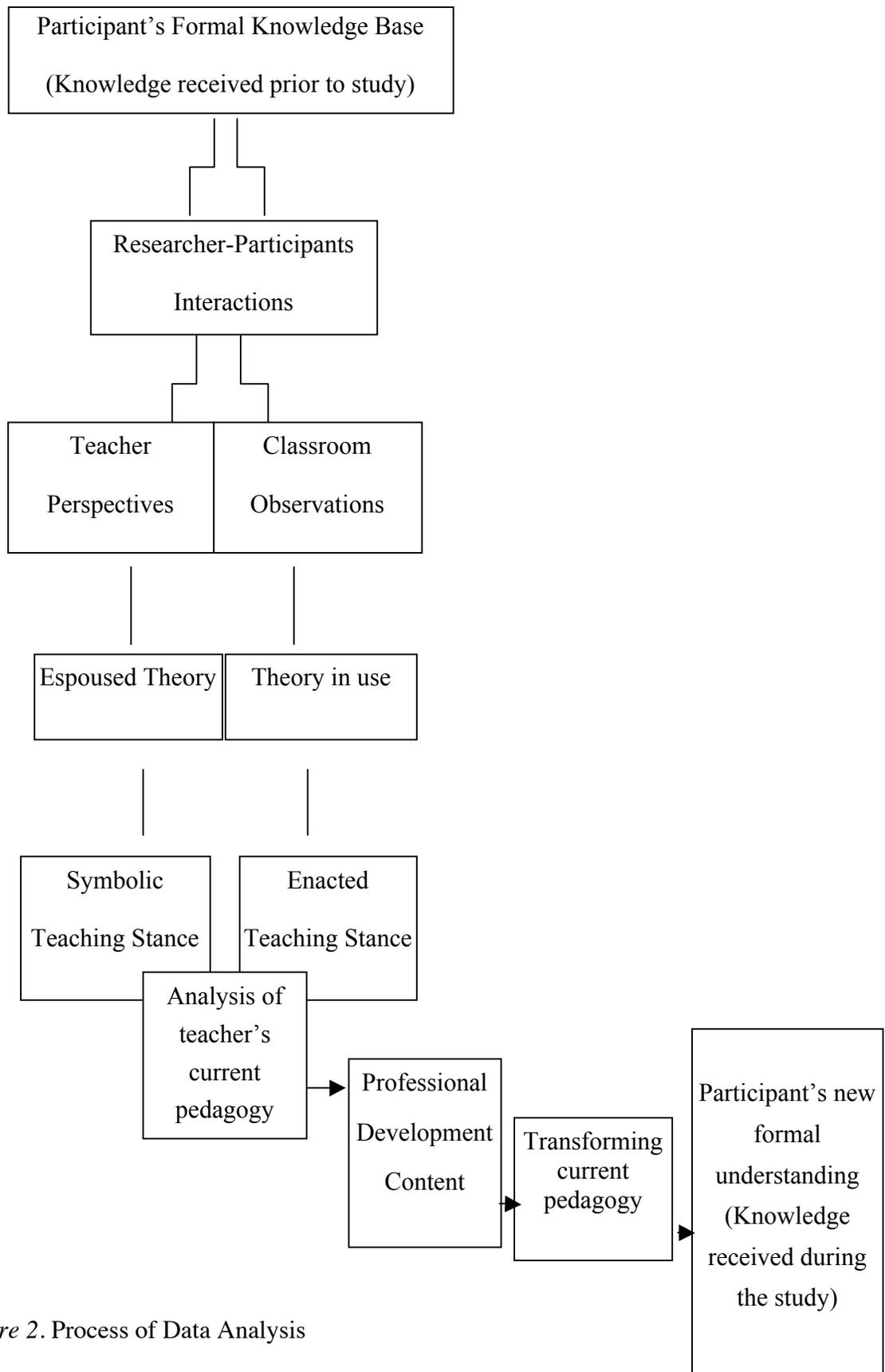


Figure 2. Process of Data Analysis

This chapter focuses on pertinent findings from interviews, classroom observations, which included learning environments and teacher-student interactions, and feedback from professional development workshops. I utilized narratives throughout this study to describe the teachers' autobiographies, classroom observations, and data collected from professional development workshops. The data gathered in this study helped address the overarching research question and accompanying questions:

What role does culture play in teaching in urban classrooms for the teachers at Daniel Preschool?

How do teachers at Daniel Preschool feel about integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment within an urban preschool classroom?

What are early childhood teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching in urban classrooms?

How do the teachers draw upon African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching?

In what ways are teachers at Daniel Preschool transforming their current pedagogy?

### **Participants' Formal Knowledge Base**

**Researcher-participant interactions.** During the month of January 2010, the preliminary and preparatory phase of the study, I did an internal scan of the culture that yielded more of an internal weakness rather than strength. The scan of the school detected that the staff at Daniel Preschool, according to Dezieck (2003), fit into Janssen's Four Room Apartment Model. This model includes four categories, such as contentment, renewal, denial, or confusion. A large number of the internal stakeholders were identified

under the contentment part of Janssen's model. The internal stakeholders include a total of 26 content area teachers, 7 special education teachers, 7 special area teachers, 30 education services personnel, 58 paraprofessionals, 1 principal, and 1 vice principal. The core competencies of the school are that it employs teachers and staff who majorly impact the learning of the students, which prepares them for further academic advancement (Harvard Business School, 2005).

During my four-year tenure at Daniel Preschool, I began identifying the lack of cultural responsiveness through informal observations of teachers' frustrations with their African American students. It was common to see the same African American students on any school day standing inside the booth at the front desk with a school security guard. I often inquired to the security guard who the student's teacher was and the reason why the student was standing there. The number one response was always "He/she constantly talks in class and just won't listen to the teacher" (Officer Mims, personal communication, November 20, 2010). During an observation of the daily operations of the school, I discovered several interesting characteristics of the tenured staff. For instance, most of the tenured staff exemplified haughty behavior, functioned by their own rules, and lacked respect for the school administrator. The tenured employees operated based on their own set of beliefs rather than the profession of their vocation. Upon further analysis of the staff through the use of informal conversations and interviews, many of the employees were displeased with the management and increased daily responsibilities. The following staff members were documented as saying "The principal has no clue on what she's doing and when she tries to make changes to the school, I ignore her" (H. Pepper, personal communication, September 19, 2011). "Schools need consistency

and this school has none” (D. Watson, personal communication, September 21, 2011). “She makes too many changes during the school year and then she wonders why the staff is frustrated” (W. Allen, personal communication, September 23, 2011). The actions of these staff members become part of the school’s dominant culture. Because tenured teachers at Daniel Preschool are the dominant groups who have many years within the school district, it became apparent that teachers new to the school and novice teachers were more apt to change and a better fit for my study.

I intentionally looked at new teachers with less than three years of service at Daniel School and their beliefs regarding culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, the study utilized a start list of codes, which helped inform my preliminary phase of what I was interested in researching, the analysis of data, and the crafting of themes that emerged. In May of 2011, I began a series of more informal conversations with new teachers from Daniel Preschool regarding their beliefs about culturally responsive pedagogy. I decided that I would look at the relationship between teacher and student and classroom environment. Observing teacher-student interactions would give insight on the teachers’ theory in use and pedagogical stance within the classroom.

*Teacher interviews.* This section focuses on the participants’ espoused theory responses that I captured from the initial interview in Cycle I related to the research questions. Understanding the teachers’ initial answers served as an integral part in understanding their formal knowledge of implementing cultural responsive pedagogy. Interviews conducted with teachers offered an opportunity to allow the participants’ to discuss their espoused theory. The four participants’ responses illustrated their formal understanding of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in an urban school. I

gathered data from the initial taped interviews with the participants to help illustrate their perspectives regarding cultural responsive pedagogy.

The curriculum utilized in early childhood at Daniel Preschool did not focus on the students' culture so it was important to discuss the role of culture and its impact within the urban classrooms. Initially during my first interview with the participants, the role of culture was discussed, and how it was incorporated into the classroom. The participants all described the role of culture prior to the classroom observations part of the study. Ms. Kelly defined the role of culture as something children should be able to see, hear, and relate to in their classroom. Mrs. Benson described the role of culture as acknowledging a student's culture while sharing and experiencing it daily within the classroom. Ms. Duncan expressed that the role of culture as critical because it allows students to encounter bits and pieces in an urban setting, particularly early childhood. Mrs. Benet stated that the role of culture is important for students to be able to connect their home experiences to the classroom learning environment. The teacher interviews yielded various data regarding the role of culture.

During the interview, Ms. Kelly talked about her beliefs and feelings regarding culture. Ms. Kelly talked about how she initially began teaching in Lakeshore, but left shortly thereafter, because she found the students who were predominately Caucasian, unfriendly, and anti-social. Ms. Kelly, a Caucasian teacher, felt that she would have a better experience working with students from the inner city. Ms. Kelly described her pedagogy according to the needs of her students. She looks to see if real learning takes place and if she is successful with relating to her students. Ms. Kelly described herself as an educator who believed that sensitivity towards social class took precedence over

culture when compared to urban and suburban students. She proclaimed that the incorporation of different cultures within her classroom were evident through literature, activities, and celebration of holidays. Ms. Kelly stated that a student's culture is important within the classroom and accommodations should be made.

Mrs. Benson described her pedagogy as a responsibility to learn from her students' culture and share it with the other students within her classroom. Mrs. Benson often permitted her students to call her by her first name, which she believed enabled the students to feel comfortable with understanding different types of people who make up their community in which they live. Mrs. Benson's view on culture included:

This is America, The Melting Pot. We all have something to learn from each other in a small/big way that can broaden our horizons and allow us to grow and appreciate one another. I, as an educator, should focus on students' habits, holidays, foods and anything else a student or parent can bring to the classroom. I feel that the sharing of cultures enhances and expands a child's spectrum. My perceptions about culturally responsive teaching in an urban school classroom would be to embrace a student's dress, food, holidays, language, and customs. Utilizing student's culture/experience would include addressing the needs of individual children. Focusing on their habits, their holidays, their foods and anything else a parent can bring to my attention as a teacher. If I can address it to the class as a whole, then this would be a more positive environment. (Personal Interview, Benson, 2/3/12)

Mrs. Benson described the school's curriculum as a method for forming family partnerships. I specifically remember going back to the curriculum to find where the district's curriculum helped form family partnerships. Although Daniel Preschool permitted parents to visit the school, which was a form of integrating students' culture/experience into the classroom, the district's curriculum did not specify family partnerships. It was during this time that I realized that Mrs. Benson had perhaps included forming partnerships with parents into her pedagogical stance as a way to include student culture into the classroom. Mrs. Benson stated that her classroom was a place for her

students to experience various cultures as well as share their own with the class. She believed in the open door policy allowing parents access, which encouraged them to spend time in their child's classroom.

Mrs. Benson described her prior knowledge of teaching urban students as minimal. She believed that while teachers learned about their students, the student should learn about the teacher's ethnicity. I described Mrs. Benson's pedagogy as multifaceted, that considered various issues of her students such as working single mothers and fathers, siblings raising siblings, hunger, and bullying. Parental involvement is what she values as an educator as well as her relationship with her students. Mrs. Benson stated that she wanted her students to trust and feel safe with her with an assurance of having their interest.

Ms. Duncan stated during a taped interview prior to the study that she had minor experiences working in an urban school district. She stated that although teaching low socioeconomic status students from the inner city had its challenges, it was certainly possible for all children to learn regardless of their environment. In addition, during the initial taped interview session, Ms. Duncan stated that she constructed her pedagogy from the belief that students from large economically disadvantaged areas were exposed to high crime rates and lack of jobs. Because of her knowledge of the city district there were several factors that formed her pedagogy. In the interview she stated that her pedagogy included child led and teacher guided techniques.

Ms. Duncan gave her perspectives on drawing upon African American student's culture/experience in her approach to teaching. "I think it is critical that children encounter bits and pieces of their culture in the classroom setting in an urban district. I

believe this is especially important for such young children that we teach who may be exposed to different cultures in their home.” Her pedagogy also included treating parents with respect regardless of their socio economic status, which helped demonstrate positive interests in the student. She further described her beliefs regarding sensitivity of students:

For example where we are teaching is predominately African American; we have a lot of Spanish children as well. So that means that we need to be sensitive to sometimes their Muslim culture, sensitive to their religious beliefs, sensitive to their eating and the eating habits that they may have at home. Speaking to their parents in their home language if possible or finding someone to help you if you don't understand parent. (Personal Interview, Duncan, 2/1/12)

Mrs. Benet was the only participant who taught in the same district where she grew up. Mrs. Benet, an African American, had always taught in an urban school district, but taught predominately Latino students. Mrs. Benet's beliefs regarding her pedagogy demonstrated consistency and classroom rules. Although there were differences in the dynamics of culture, personality challenges, consistency, and flexibility, worked with all the students. Mrs. Benet believed that she had the benefit of living in the same neighborhood that her students reside. The commonalties that she shares with her students and their families are that everyone wants great educational outcomes. This accomplishment came through demonstrating sensitivity of cultural beliefs of each family by maintaining high expectations for all students and exposing them to other cultures besides their own.

I think it's our responsibility to just not expose them to their own culture but to other cultures as well. So you'll see Asian influences in art work that I have hanging in my dramatic play area. You will see Mexican throws in the dramatic play area. You are going to see, you know different cultures represented in books and puppets. But the same principles are the same, you are going to be respectful of the different cultures and just talk to parents, just talk to the families. Just see what's important to them. (Personal Interview, Benet, 2/1/12)

In addition, this section also utilized Gay (2000) as means of examining and interpreting interview data based on the participants' formal knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. In forming a knowledge base about the teachers, it was important to determine if they discussed classroom practice in the following ways:

a) comprehensive, b) multidimensional, c) empowerment, and/or d) transformative.

Participants described their formal knowledge of facilitating culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom through the use of art, music, experimenting with food, and celebrating holidays. Banks (1999) describes the teachers' initial beliefs as lower level generalizations that can likely be taught to only two to three areas of content simultaneously. Participants mentioned that their background helped shape their perspectives about life and later influenced their perspectives regarding the role of culture in teaching.

An analysis of interview data examining the teachers' perspectives on the role culture plays in teaching in urban classrooms indicated that teachers' believe that culture plays an important part in the classroom. Ms. Kelly believed that children should be exposed to other cultures beside their own, Mrs. Benson, stated that culture is important, Ms. Duncan asserted that it is critical, and Mrs. Benet expressed that culture has a positive impact on students.

Mrs. Benet was the only participant who answered the question beginning with "I." She started the sentence with "I" and placed herself directly in the process and used language that valued the role of culturally responsive pedagogy. She pointed to the positive impact that it can have on students' self-esteem. Each of the participants used language that strongly pointed to the value of cultural responsiveness in teaching and

learning. One of the findings of the first research question demonstrated that teachers saw a value of culture in the classroom. The teachers however did not demonstrate definitions that were rooted in deep pedagogical understandings.

Participants gave similar responses to the idea of integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment. For instance, Ms. Kelly and Mrs. Benson both began and addressed the questions with the duties of teachers, while Ms. Duncan focused on what education should include and Mrs. Benet responded with what she believed. An analysis of the responses about teachers' feelings indicated that the participants felt that students should be able to see, feel, and hear their culture within the classroom. Although, the responses were not rooted in deep pedagogical discourse, there was again talk that affirmed integrating students' culture into the teaching environment. Ms. Kelly acknowledged that the classroom should "focus" on things that students can "relate to." Mrs. Benson emphasized that classrooms should "embrace" students "customs." Ms. Duncan pointed out that education "must include cultural teaching and learning styles." Mrs. Benet stated that it was "necessary" and that she makes an "effort to do so regularly." The participants' responses all illustrated that students' culture was an important element with preschool classrooms. In addition, their responses reflected their espoused theory of their pedagogical stance regarding urban preschool classrooms.

The participants were asked about their initial perception about culturally responsive teaching in an urban classroom. The responses regarding perception all varied. No participant directly answered the research question by addressing a formal knowledge-base regarding culturally responsive teaching. A formal understanding might have included a class, peer coaching, and course of study, workshop, readings, or the

development of a pedagogy that emerged from work in an urban context with urban students. Although Ms. Kelly's answer expressed the positive impact of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, she did not specifically identify or define culturally responsive pedagogy. Mrs. Benson and Ms. Duncan both gave what they believed were culturally responsive teaching examples. Ms. Duncan's response revealed that she focused more on cultural responsiveness with Hispanic students. She did not address African American students, the focus of the study, and dominant race within Daniel Preschool. In fact, Mrs. Benet stated that educators were unsure what it meant to use culturally responsive teaching and she may have included herself. Mrs. Benet addressed the interview question with the focus on other educators rather than identifying her understanding about culturally responsive teaching in an urban classroom. An analysis demonstrated that culturally responsive teaching is something to be valued, however the participants lacked formal knowledge that might have been gained through education, peer coaching, or professional development workshops for understanding culturally responsive approaches. The responses referred to rewarding experiences, holidays, incorporating Latino experiences, and expressing that people were unsure what it meant to use culturally responsive teaching.

The participants were asked during the interview how they draw upon their African American students' culture/experience and their approach to teaching. This was another opportunity for participants to illustrate how they enacted their culturally responsive teaching stance. Ms. Kelly stated that she displayed and read books; Mrs. Benson discussed how she incorporated her students' culture into their classroom through the use of literature and family artifacts, such as pictures that students brought from

home. Ms. Duncan detailed how she utilized language as a method for drawing upon students' culture/experience. Mrs. Benet's ambiguous answer might lead the reader to believe that she did not address African American students' culture or other cultures within the classroom. An analysis of the responses yielded that displaying and reading books, utilizing an artificial spruce tree to display family pictures, using language, and making a conscious effort to do so, addressed drawing upon African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching.

The following responses described the participants' beliefs regarding incorporating students' culture into the classroom. Ms. Kelly and Mrs. Benson connected transformative pedagogy with celebrating holidays and sharing family stories or family members. While these are worthy components of instruction and include aspects of culture, the focus was on honoring culture and would not be considered transformative according to Gay's (2002) definition. Ms. Duncan acknowledged that she needed to work on incorporating more of the Hispanic culture into her current pedagogy. Her ability to connect with her African American students was based on her own cultural knowledge. Mrs. Benet identified possibly transforming her current pedagogy through the use of literature and the classroom environment to integrate students' culture. An analysis of the interview data may have suggested that Mrs. Benet began early on in the study thinking about transforming her pedagogy by respecting the students' culture through the use of her classroom environment and instructional tools (Gay, 2000).

**Espoused theory findings.** The findings on teacher interviews illustrated a strong belief in demonstrating fairness to students eliminating prior biases, establishing a positive classroom environment, being sensitive to each student's religious beliefs, and

eliciting instructional materials suited for the diversity of the students. While the participants' perspectives were directly linked to their espoused theory, they all emphasized the importance of including their students' culture into their instructional lessons as a pedagogical stance. I learned that as a researcher my job was not to judge their espoused theory, but examine it through the use of culturally relevant theory.

*Classroom observations.* Informal observations that occurred prior to new administration often demonstrated inappropriate instructional methods or none at all. The many African American students found standing at the security booth for discipline problems coupled with the teachers' verbal frustration heard in the school hallway was proof that a plan of action was needed. With a new administrator on board I was met with encouragement and permission to help transform the teacher's current pedagogy. This section collected data from the culturally responsive pedagogical observation protocol (Appendix E). The two-part protocol examined 1) teacher-student interactions and 2) classroom learning environment. The examination of teacher-student interactions utilized Ladson-Billings (2009a) concept of culturally relevant relations. Ladson-Billings describes culturally relevant teaching regarding teacher-student relations as humane and flexible that extends pass the classroom. The exploration of classroom learning environment used Montgomery (2001) as a framework for exploring the classroom environment. Montgomery (2001) describes culturally responsive classrooms as acknowledging the culture of diverse students. Teachers are responsible for establishing a climate of learning that reflects the culture within their classroom (Montgomery, 2001). Visual displays are important and necessary to help students connect their culture/experience with those of the school environment since most preschool students do

not read. Students between the ages of 3 and 6 begin to start to comprehend letters and sound them out. As students progress in each grade within elementary school they begin to identify sight words as well as read (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000).

An essential piece of this study involved observations, so it was pertinent to immerse myself into each classroom. Classroom observations occurred three times a week with unannounced visits. Because of the unannounced visits, participants had the option of emailing me the week before if they knew that certain days would be hectic inside their classroom. During the study, I only received one email from Mrs. Benet who requested to not be observed on Mondays. The observations occurred in the naturalistic setting of the classroom where I looked for visual displays that represented the students' culture such as posters, books, pictures of the students, and bulletin boards. I initially interviewed all the participants to record their formal understanding of implementing culturally responsive teaching identified with an answer from the interview questions, subsequently documenting teacher-student interactions and the classroom environment from the classroom observations.

Examining the teachers' instructional approach was the starting point for qualitative research. This would be the first time a researcher and current practitioner would be allowed into the classrooms of Daniel Preschool to observe teachers for non-administrative duties. Immersing myself into the participants' classroom supported the future social change piece for transforming teachers' instructional approaches. During the last several years, there were changes in leadership and occurrences that impacted the school culture and classroom environment. The school went from having a non-visible,

almost non-existent administrator to an administrator who made herself very visible and accessible.

Classroom observations yielded data that pointed to various levels of the participants' understanding of cultural responsive pedagogy and helped establish professional development workshops for the participants. The initial data that I collected from the observations in the beginning focused on classroom environment and teacher and student interactions that were categorized and examined. While the research looked at the role of culture and classroom instruction at Daniel Preschool, it also addressed how teachers felt about integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment. This study examined the illustration of teacher pedagogy and classroom practices. Caution was utilized during the examination of relationships between teacher and student, culture, and classroom management (Tucker, 1999). By looking at teachers' pedagogical beliefs it demonstrated how they viewed culture and the influence of culture in urban classrooms. Argyris and Schön (1974) describe putting ones beliefs into action as a theory in use. The analysis of data utilizing the observation protocol helped establish a list for themes confirmed by the collected data. The themes were a result of analyzed data that had been coded (Saldana, 2009). Within this study, I intentionally began with a start list of codes that later translated into themes, such as communication with parents, teachers' feelings about student culture, classroom management, and instructional techniques. The teachers in the study had distinct social, economic, and cultural backgrounds that established a foundation for their values and beliefs that was gathered from the initial interviews. These values and beliefs shaped their instructional strategies within their classroom. Classroom observations of each teacher-student interaction revealed varied information

during this research, which included varying levels of representation of culture, degrees of teacher-student interactions, and how it may have impacted academic learning as well as how the classroom environment addressed culturally relevant practice. I was also interested in how participants utilized their students' families as a resource for connecting school environment to home environment using the classroom as a direct link. Classroom observations within the context were collected and interpreted within a natural setting (Anderson & Burns, 1989).

Teachers have an amazing ability to impact students, which transmits outside the corridors of the schools. Ms. Kelly, who seemed during the inception of my research unsure if she was right for the study, made strives within her classroom. Ms. Kelly's classroom setting was reasonably culturally responsive in the display of African American and Hispanic books and some learning materials, but it was not always evident in the quality and nature of her interaction with the students. During one of my classroom observations, one of her students appeared dazed and not focused on the lesson and at times the student looked like she was day-dreaming.

Teacher: "Wake up and snap out of it. Show Ms. Jones how smart you are." The teacher never asked the student while I was present if she was ok. However, from observing her I knew that she was serious about her student's learning. I knew that deep inside those individuals who appeared hardened on the outside were indeed the ones with the biggest hearts.

Mrs. Benson described ways that culture was achieved in her classroom to encourage students to bring in items that represented their culture such as foods that might relate to the instructional themes. Also, teachers utilizing parents as a classroom

resource helped reinforce learning in the classroom. For example, during one of my observations, a parent was invited to demonstrate to the students how to cook a meal from her culture. The parent of the African American culture had decided to show the students how to make potato salad, a regular African American dish. This was an important use of a student's culture since the population of students within her classroom represented the African American culture. The significance of this activity was that the teacher utilized the students' culture to make the lessons more relevant to the students, but she also demonstrated culturally responsiveness with building partnerships with their families.

Ms. Duncan epitomized empowerment of her students through motivation and focused student-teacher relationships. Gay (2002) describes these types of culturally responsive teaching techniques as empowerment and multidimensional. Ms. Duncan displayed strong student-teacher relationships but it was not always evident in her classroom environment. Ms. Duncan presented the idea as utilizing the students' neighborhood as resource for the classroom, such as walking around their neighborhood. The ideal of utilizing the students' neighborhood illustrated a great way for incorporating the student's culture of their environment. Ms. Duncan stated that there were times that tangible artifacts were not easily accessible but that an effort was always made to include the students' culture.

It was during one of the classroom observations that I begin an inquiry of Ms. Duncan's communication style. Parents often stayed and talked with her in the morning about topics outside of the school curriculum. In essence, Ms. Duncan's relationship with parents helped establish a strong resource for including students' culture

into her instructional lesson. I found the implementation of family partnerships very interesting as it contributed to enhancing communication and establishing cultural responsiveness.

Although Mrs. Benet's instructional environment demonstrated the role and value that culture plays in teaching of African-American and Hispanic students through the display of books, photographs, artifacts on walls and shelves, she often lacked comprehensive and parts of multidimensional cultural responsive techniques. I did not want to speculate whether the students were knowledgeable about the artifacts or the displayed books, so I further evaluated her classroom through observations. Mrs. Benet, a parent of an African American child, discussed how she exposed her students to certain books, toys, dolls, clothes, and dress up clothes. She had a variety of items in her classroom from her students' culture as well as other cultures. Mrs. Benet displayed Asian influences of artwork hanging on the walls and Mexican throws (rugs) in the dramatic play area. In addition, she also incorporated the students' culture through books and puppets.

**Symbolic teaching stance.** Each participant demonstrated a cursory reflective nature regarding the role of a culture in classroom practice. However, all of the teachers lacked understanding regarding the transformative potential of culturally responsive pedagogy. As findings emerged from the interviews, it was evidenced that teachers had limited knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. They were all unable to frame cultural approaches to teaching that emerged from comprehensive, multidimensional, empowerment and/or transformative perspectives (Gay, 2000). Being transformative involves helping students to develop the: knowledge, skills, and values needed to become

social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective, personal, social, political, and economic action. Gay (2000) describes transformative as utilizing students' cultural background as a means establishing instructional lessons. One of probable causes may connect to their beliefs about race, culture, class, ethnic background and how it impacts instructional methods (Gay, 2010). The findings from the interview support that teachers were not cognitively aware of their instructional practices. Also, the data indicated that teachers had to first become aware of their instructional methods and then learn how to modify them to adapt to their diverse populations of students (Gay, 2000).

**Theory in use.** During my initial visit to Ms. Kelly's classroom, the building principal arrived with a treat wagon for students who had read the exceeded number of required books for the 100 book challenge. After the students received their treats from the principal, whom is Latina, the teacher prompted the students with "What do you say?" One student said thank you and the other students said gracias, which is thank you in Spanish. It appeared that the belief of the teacher was to place a premium on incorporating other languages into the classroom spoken by the students, however this was not the main indicator of culturally responsive teaching. Ms. Kelly's classroom lacked warmth and relationship, the type of nurturing that would be found in a kindergarten classroom. Hollins (1993) states that bridging the gap between teacher and student first begins with helping the teacher find their place in a cultural diverse society. The focus of my first visit was to identify the different types of culturally responsive displays within Ms. Kelly's classroom. Her classroom demonstrated a respect of culture in general, but did not always reflect the culture of the students present. I observed

informational posters during the course of the study that reflected Chinese New Year, St. Patrick's Day, and Hanukah. Her visual displays did not reflect the African American student population within her classroom. Her responses from the initial interview regarding culture led me to believe that she practiced culturally responsive pedagogical practices. She demonstrated a lack of culturally responsive approaches for using her student's culture as a knowledge base for instruction (Banks, 1999).

However, the first three observations of her classroom did not reveal culturally responsive pedagogical practices. During the classroom observations, Ms. Kelly lacked a "warm demeanor" in which she did not demonstrate special nurturing for students but more of an authority figure and disciplinarian (Ware, 2006). The goal of public schools is to socialize the students into their culture, often unspoken, causes students to miss the mark of academic success (Tyson, 2003). My observations and interactions with Ms. Kelly, during my initial interview, illustrated a stern demeanor. I believe that a teacher must set rules and guidelines for managing the classroom but not through intimidation or dictatorship. Teachers have not been taught how to correctly socialize with other cultural groups, outside of their own (Tyson, 2003).

Ms. Kelly was the only participant within the study whose classroom did not display a visible class schedule. However, each time I visited her classroom, Ms. Kelly rang her bell at the exact time each day to prompt the students to switch to another learning center. It appeared that during each observation, she kept the same schedule in sync with the classroom clock. The teacher divided the students into four groups based on their academic abilities. During several of the classroom observations, Ms. Kelly often focused her attention with a different learning group each day, which normally included

three to four students who sat on a rug in front of the board. Ms. Kelly later told me that the students were grouped according to their academic level. The rest of the students utilized learning centers in groups of three also known as cooperative learning, which encouraged students to work with each other.

It was during my fifth visit when I observed her interaction with the lower level learning students. The teacher expected classroom independence regardless of the students' academic ability. Although the teacher maintained a consistent schedule, she did not personalize her lessons to establish a stronger relationship between her and the students. For instance, I observed the teacher elevating her voice at a student who was not focused, the student moved a little slower than the other students and was unable to answer her questions. The teacher's response was, "You have to get used to doing things fast in kindergarten." The observations of Ms. Kelly would yield similar behaviors over the course of the study, which included, "Show Ms. J how smart you are," and "When you go to first grade your teacher wants you to be quick." Blumer (1962) describes this type of teacher-student interaction as symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism assumes that human beings act towards things on the basis of meaning that the things have for them (Blumer, 1962). These types of interactions define the teacher-student relationship. When these interactions were applied to the culturally responsive model Ms. Kelly demonstrated a less comprehensive approach (Gay, 2000). She lacked culturally responsive practices for implementing instructional lessons to the learning styles of each of her students (Payne & Ginwright, 2011).

During a visit to her classroom, she gave a particular group of students' "special" attention to ensure that they would grasp the concept of how to write upper and lower

case “I.” There was one student who was behind in grasping the concept. Ms. Kelly reacted by saying, “You have to get used to doing things fast in kindergarten.” Objectively, I might have approached this concern by utilizing Gay’s (2002) transformative approach to cultural responsive teaching. In addition, there were other observations that reinforced the teacher-student relationship through observations of artifacts within the classroom. For instance, each early childhood teacher develops a morning message to their students which helps communicate a part of the day’s schedule, reinforces the students’ concept of identifying letters and words, as well as establishing a means for teacher-student communication. On this particular day, the teacher had written a message on the board to the students, which read, “Good morning everyone! Today is Friday, February 10, 2012. I wasn’t here yesterday because I was at a meeting. I missed all of you. We will come up to the library after lunch.” Although this was a great method for letting students know they matter to the teacher, her interactions with the students were less interactive.

Teachers have an amazing ability to impact students, which transmits outside the corridors of the schools. During one of my classroom observations, one of her students appeared dazed and not focused on the lesson and at times the student looked like she was day-dreaming. Ms. Kelly’s response was, “Wake up and snap out of it. Show Ms. Jones how smart you are.” According to Nieto (1996), she respected the students’ cultural background with visual displays but she incorporated minimal facts into her instructional lessons. Ms. Kelly lacked the appropriate skills for building on her students’ culture (Nieto, 1996). The teacher never asked the student while I was present if she was OK. The teacher lacked confidence in her student by not giving her extra time to process

the questions (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). As the researcher, I observed that she was serious about students learning, but lacked the ability to connect with her students to reach cultural excellence.

Further examination of the teacher-student relationship between Ms. Kelly and her students based on the previous classroom observations revealed that her students probably defined school through their interaction with her. For example, some of her students lacked facial expressions as they interacted with Ms. Kelly. The students sometimes gave blank stares when asked questions by Ms. Kelly. The movement of students from preschool to junior high is defined by various characteristics of a student's native language, types of foods, and their physical characteristics (Tatum, 1997). The observations of teacher initiated student interactions within Ms. Kelly's classroom revealed very similar characteristics of Mrs. Benson's classroom with the exception of the rigid classroom schedule.

My first impression of Mrs. Benson was that she demonstrated wisdom regarding life, but she admitted to me that she "lacked that something" when dealing with challenging behaviors of African American students particularly boys. Mrs. Benson through the classroom observations demonstrated great patience that always seemed to positively balance her classroom. However, there was something missing from the teacher-student relationships within her classroom. Although she explored conversations and relationships with students she never went deep enough to make a true connection, in most cases just scratching the surface of her students. Mrs. Benson was reflective of Gay's (2002) culturally responsive definition, which demonstrated comprehensive and transformative teaching but often lacked the qualities of multidimensional techniques.

For instance, during one of the observations, Mrs. Benson read a story about sneakers called “These Shoes” to her class that is about an African American boy who wants new high-top sneakers, but his grandmother could not afford to buy them. These types of sneakers normally have the manufacturer’s logo on the high top shoe that covers the wearer’s ankles are also known as Converse, Chuck Taylor, and All Star Sneakers. These sneakers were particularly popular among African American boys particularly during the 70s and 80s. When the student in Mrs. Benson’s class showed her his high tops she seemingly glanced at the shoes, made no comment and then went back to reading the story. The African American student interrupted Mrs. Benson again to show her his sneakers and she completely disregarded him giving no response to his comment. As the researcher, I saw this as an excellent moment to connect with the student by establishing conversation either during the lesson or afterwards regarding his taste in sneakers. Mrs. Benson had missed a great opportunity to build her student-teacher relationship through utilizing strategies within the context of learning. Although Mrs. Benson used literature relevant to her students, she did not explore in-depth opportunities to expand her students learning as well as make a connection to their life experiences. Prior to this observation, Mrs. Benson had noted that her espoused theory was “uplifting and bringing something more positive to the classroom.” However, Mrs. Benson’s espoused theory was much different from her pedagogical theory in use.

Mrs. Benson’s classroom atmosphere was flexible and interactive but the observations revealed no real connection between her and the students. The students within this classroom demonstrated a separate community than that of their teacher. The students talked more to each other instead of including the teacher into their

conversations. As I observed the teacher further, it appeared that she appeared left out of the “ethnography of communication” her students established among themselves (Anderson & Burns, 1989). For instance, the students used certain phrases or words that only they understood. The students utilized their own culture to process the interaction between them and the teacher such as raising their hands first and then waiting for acknowledgment. The teacher relied heavily on her knowledge base as an educator rather than understanding how her students interpreted and related to rules, structures, and social interactions (Anderson & Burns, 1989). Mrs. Benson missed opportunities to connect the lesson to students’ culture, which impacted student engagement. For instance, during several observations the teacher talked about different types of houses that people lived in such as igloos and huts but did not ask students about where they lived or their types of houses. The observations illustrated that Mrs. Benson could have gone deeper with her students, but may have lacked the necessary skills to strengthen her relationship with her students. According to Carter (2003), Morris (2005), and Valdes (1996), research reveals teachers like Mrs. Benson may have perceptions in classrooms that create a strong possibility of strain among teacher-student interactions between Black and Hispanic students and White teachers. According to the culturally relevant model, Mrs. Benson lacked approaches for interacting with students of various cultures different from her. She did not address the students’ specific race within her lesson and did she did not take time to connect the lesson to her students environment.

Although Ms. Duncan’s classroom environment and visual aids did not represent the population of students within her classroom, the nature of her teaching style initiated interactions with the students was different. The teacher spoke to the some of the students

as if she had known them for many years. She built her classroom management around student-teacher relationships, also an element of Gay's (2002) multidimensional technique for culturally responsive teacher. It was during my fifth classroom observation of Ms. Duncan when I observed the relationship between the teacher and a student. I observed a little girl wiggling in her seat and assumed that she really needed to use the bathroom. The student raised her hand for the bathroom and the teacher answered no. I was surprised at the teacher's answer and my facial expression illustrated my concern, after all this was early childhood. The teacher looked at me and said "She does this every day, asks to go to the bathroom and just stands in front of the mirror looking at herself." I definitely believed that during this time most teachers had some knowledge about their students, particularly their daily habits, but the bigger picture from what I observed was that the student wanted attention.

The observations documented from Ms. Duncan's class depicted a very relationship centered environment. Ms. Duncan's interactions between her students were very strong and nurturing. The classroom observations of Ms. Duncan demonstrated ownership of her students and their behavior. Ms. Duncan, a young African American teacher, often interacted with the students in a way that was comparable to how African American mothers or grandmothers might address children's challenging behaviors. Ms. Duncan's interaction with her students displayed a deeper connection and ownership of their behavior. Teachers are responsible for educating other people's children; therefore develop strategies for accomplishing the curriculum (Delpit, 2006). It was during my fifth visit that one of her students refused to stay seated. At first it appeared that Ms. Duncan was intentionally ignoring the student but then she gave him "the look"

and then said, “I love you but you got one more time.” In many African American contexts, “the look” often referred to nonverbal reprimands particularly from an African American mother or female figure relative. African American teachers in urban school settings often use a direct teaching style that incorporated facial expressions. The use of facial expression in the African American culture is a way of reinforcing rules in a controlled environment (Delpit, 2006). As a result, this particular student crawled back to his seat and finally sat down. Her approach demonstrated a sense of concern and that she had a major investment in her students’ behavior and academic success. In essence she exemplified a very nurturing environment, congruent to a mother figure. According to Jones-Thomas, McCurtis-Witherspoon, and Speight (2004), African American women base their exclusive experiences, beliefs, and influences on how they live out their daily lives. Research has shown that African American teachers, who demonstrate techniques to help maintain black students’ behavior, expect more of their students (Foster 1990; Morris 2005; Tyson, 2003). By utilizing facial expressions such as the “look,” Ms. Duncan used her students’ culture as a knowledge base to communicate with them. The theorists in the theoretical framework link the use of using marginalized students’ culture as a knowledge base for implementing class instruction rather than using it as an obstacle. One reason that African American women demonstrate such a nurturing disposition is that their beliefs place a prominent value on nurturing both with and outside of the family (Abdullah, 1998; Boyd-Franklin, 1991; Greene, 1994, as cited in Jones-Thomas et al., 2004).

This interaction with her students is also described as “other-mothering,” in which the teacher assumes the role of an extended family member (Ware, 2006). Ms. Duncan

sometimes acted if she were the students' mother by telling them that she knew where they lived and had taught past siblings. Although Ms. Duncan had not grown up in the same community of her students, she reigned from a similar community.

It was during an observation of Ms. Duncan's classroom, that I observed her instructional lessons with her African American and Hispanic students. Her classroom was very nicely defined with signs and posters that did not represent the population of her students. It was during one of my observations that I had an epiphany. The teacher was doing a math lesson and she utilized magnetic ducks and butterflies as an instructional tool. My thoughts were "did the students like butterflies and ducks?" So I asked the teacher whose idea was it to use the ducks and the butterflies. Her response was "the students." The students were engaged and responsive to the lesson, although the duck and butterfly magnets did not represent anyone's culture within the classroom. As a researcher, I was looking forward to reinforcing the role a student's culture played within education, particularly at Daniel Preschool. I quickly reminded myself that social inequality still exists within the United States and economically disadvantaged students within urban areas were susceptible to crime, limited resources, and minimal productivity (Ladson-Billings, 2005). It was the teacher's job to introduce to the students the diversity of cultural worldviews. However, the influences of school culture have the ability to promote and undermine the culture of the students (Tyson, 2003). As the researcher, I was sure of one thing; this study would serve as the voice of the voiceless at Daniel Preschool and an instrument for advocating social justice among ethnically diverse students.

My initial impression of Mrs. Benet during one of my observations of her learning environment was that she appeared very concerned about her students. She often spoke about her passion for working with inner city children, particularly in Empire since she was a native of her students' neighborhood. Mrs. Benet had a very active classroom, more active than I have ever seen with students moving around during instructional time. I was not sure how she maintained patience with so many challenging behaviors and disruptions of students. Mrs. Benet displayed a very gentle laid back personality and rarely appeared frustrated, particularly when students were consistently disruptive during lessons. I documented during my observations, that I had a difficult time focusing on her interaction between students because of the constant disruptions from the students.

She offered an engaging classroom environment that focused on utilizing multidimensional teaching methods demonstrated through her interactions with students as well as teaching strategies. The data gathered and analyzed from the study demonstrated inconsistencies from my participant's initial answers in contrast to the classroom and teacher-student observations. During one of my observations, she talked about the topic of exercise with her students. It was noticeably obvious from the artifacts she had placed around the classroom representing the culture of African American students, such as books on hip hop, tap dance shoes, and basketball but did not use any of the books while I was present to reinforce her lesson on exercise.

The classroom observations of Mrs. Benet and the interactions between her students displayed an autonomous environment where reprimand to control students behavior was non-existent. Mrs. Benet is the only participant who currently resides within the city of her students. Mrs. Benet demonstrated concern for each student but the

constant interruptions of students and her need to redirect students impacted many of her lessons. She often spent more time repeating classroom rules while no repercussions followed for non-compliance. The teacher-student interaction often lacked depth, demonstrating itself through the students' refusal to adhere to directions. There were several visits that I observed students during their instructional time engaged in conversation with other students while Mrs. Benet taught. It was evident that the students demonstrated a lack of strong social interaction with Mrs. Benet although she promoted class participation of each student. Although she made positive attempts for encouraging student decision-making, particularly regarding selection of songs or games played, they often became more of a hindrance for maintaining consistent order within the classroom. Students within early childhood need teachers to establish consistency, rules, and structure to allow them feel secure in their daily setting.

During one of the observations, I observed an African American student crawling around on the rug while Mrs. Benet tried to finish an instructional lesson but she ignored him and proceeded to teach the rest of the class. According to Foster (1990), Morris (2005), and Tyson (2003), Mrs. Benet perpetuated racial stereotypes regarding her students instead of establishing strong foundational classroom rules that would help govern black students' behavior. She reinforced the assumptions that African American students are unruly and disobedient. She may have unknowingly reinforced unacceptable behavior within the classroom. Instead of establishing rules as a part of classroom management she ignored the behavior, which created an unequal learning environment for all the students. She failed to maintain the disruptive behavior within her classroom, which impacted the learning environment. It is hard for students to concentrate on a

lesson when other students are crawling or walking around the room during an instructional lesson.

### **Enacted Teaching Stance**

I noted in the beginning of the study that some teachers occasionally utilized communication and language as a way to engage and build relationships with their students, while others used literature and the classroom environment. Many of the participants encouraged their students to bring items from home. However, the majority had not utilized specialized techniques for utilizing a student's culture in their approach to teaching nor the environment. Many of the observations demonstrated nicely decorated rooms that did not represent the culture of their students. A major part of culturally responsive classroom management is classroom rules (Weiner, 2003). The observations indicated that the classroom was often void of rules and expectations or communicative styles consistent with the students' culture. Managing a culturally responsive classroom according to Weiner (2003) includes: (a) creating physical environment anchored around academic and social goals, which includes student photographs, personalized group discussion that utilize student created bulletin board displays; (b) creating classroom rules and expectations for student behavior; (c) speaking to students using common and appropriate language so that their conversation is consistent with students' cultural backgrounds; (d) developing a conscious classroom that acknowledges students diverse background by speaking to them in their native language; (e) working with families to help provide direction regarding their children's education and academic achievement; and (f) using appropriate interventions to help students with challenging behavior problems such as redirection and rewarding acceptable behaviors.

The participants demonstrated incongruities between their espoused theories and theories in use (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The data indicated that some teachers are unsure of what it means to use a culturally responsive teaching stance. As demonstrated through the data, the participants have symbolic understandings; however these understandings were not enacted in their practice. This may be a result of being charged with meeting and focusing on state standards rather than creating a formal knowledge base. Based on the classroom observations and lesson plans that I collected from the participants, it was apparent that state standards and district curriculum were the driving force behind instruction. So while teachers' feelings about integrating a student's culture were positive and their responses during the initial interview demonstrated a formal understanding of culturally responsive teaching, they did not demonstrate extensive knowledge about implementing culturally responsive teaching. Most of the participants initially believed that they incorporated students' culture into their daily instruction.

Their formal understandings were based on their own constructed definition of culturally responsive pedagogy. The participants believed that culturally responsive teaching focused on the whole child, embracing students dress, food, holidays, language, and customs. For instance, one participant stated, "In my classroom, I display and read books that relate to my children's culture. We celebrate holidays and months that honor various cultures" (Kelly, Personal Communication, 2/13/2012). Even though teachers encouraged students to bring in items that reflected their culture to school for class discussion it did not reflect culturally responsive pedagogy. A major part of impacting the current classroom environment is obtaining a knowledge base about different cultures. Therefore, bringing in cultural artifacts to display within the classroom begins a

discussion surrounding culture, but does not alone fully represent culturally responsive teaching. However, by infusing an understanding of race or ethnicity, which is concrete and associated with specific identifiers such as the common language spoken, cultural foods, and personal physical traits, demonstrate a stronger foundation for culturally responsive pedagogy (Tatum, 1997).

The teachers believed that they were meeting the needs of their diverse population of students, but lacked fundamental knowledge. There was an evident lack of strong understanding regarding the “cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups,” such as incorporating culturally learning materials into the classroom, focusing on the entire student, motivating students to learn, and respecting students cultural background (Gay, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

The data gathered and analyzed from the study demonstrated that each teacher demonstrated their very own unique stance in their relationships to culture. I decided that the action research of the study would support a teacher’s pedagogical stance rather than fix perspective and theory (Hawley & Nieto, 2010b). The methodology of this study depended heavily on investigating, implementing, and then supporting change to organize new thinking among teachers regarding pedagogy. The analysis of data from the observations utilized Gay’s (2000) culturally responsive theory to define the participants’ level of cultural competencies using four themes that include: (a) comprehensive, (b) multidimensional, (c) empowerment, and (d) transformative.

Through the classroom observations of teachers, I gained more knowledge about their pedagogical stance, which reflected their true espoused theory in use and what type

of disposition I would use to help address the lack of culturally relevant instruction. Based on my previous informal observations of the teachers and their classrooms, their instructional techniques lacked representation of the current student population. The population of students within the participants' classrooms were predominately African American, yet the representation of their culture was either minimal or absent from the walls, books, or displays on the bulletin boards. These observations demonstrated a less culturally responsive educator than previously declared by the participants in the interviews. Therefore, based on the observations of teacher and student interactions and classroom environment, professional development workshops were created to help the participants draw upon their students' culture/experience and transform their current pedagogy. The observations helped me establish possible topics for the future professional development workshops such as understanding their students' culture, becoming a culturally responsive educator, and taking a stance on integrating their students' culture into their learning environment. The future transformation of their current pedagogy would position the participants to establish congruence between their espoused theory and theory in use (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

**Analysis of teacher's current pedagogy.** My initial observations of teachers utilizing district curriculum at Daniel Preschool demonstrated insufficient evidence of a student's culture. Culture, previously stated in Chapter 1, includes a set of values, behavior styles, dialect, nonverbal communication, and perspectives (Banks, 1999). The participants' theory in use was congruent to the district curriculum, which was reflective of focusing primarily on the curriculum and common core state standards. The district's curriculum does not avail itself to incorporating culturally relevant theory for students

who are predominately African American. Although the participants described their pedagogical styles or espoused theories, the data indicate that they have been socialized to focus on curriculum and lack the knowledge base that dictates the framework of learning within the classroom environment (Tyson, 2003). Therefore, much of the teacher-student interaction was authoritative and limited. Ladson-Billings (2009a) declares that the ongoing interactions between teacher and student and student between students are significant parts of a learning environment. Hence, the teachers' pedagogy often links to the district's curriculum. In addition, the teachers at Daniel Preschool sometimes lacked parental support and were often not utilized in the decision making process of their students. A part of the discussion for transforming a teacher's current pedagogy involves more partnership between the school district, teachers, and families. Teachers have become alienated during the period of school reform, because decisions regarding curriculum and instruction are often made by the state and local school board (Nieto, 2000).

Gay's (2000) four themes, comprehensive, multidimensional, transformative and empowerment, for establishing culturally relevant theory helped analyze and categorize the teachers within this study. The themes that emerged and a start list of codes served as a guide for constructing professional development workshops that was used later to help teachers transform their pedagogical stance. This analysis of data demonstrates where the participants began within the research (See Table 3, Appendix A). The chart of data helped develop themes by analyzing the interviews, observations, and professional development workshops. In addition, the data gathered helped develop and connect

themes relevant to the literature. The patterns and links to data were essential for categorizing data and developing themes.

**Conclusion on analysis of teacher current pedagogy.** The findings of this section indicated that each participant demonstrated an espoused theory of establishing fairness to urban students, providing a classroom environment sensitive to their students' culture, and utilizing instructional materials suited for the culture of their students. All of these findings demonstrated various ways of interacting with their students. A closer look at each participant through classroom observations illustrated their symbolic teaching stance and beliefs of teacher student interaction through their language, verbal gestures, or lack of language during classroom observations. The classroom observations of the participants' interactions between their students, classroom environment, and use of instructional materials indicated their theory in use. The theory in use suggests that the participants focused on accomplishing tasks fast in their grade level, demonstrating academic superiority to others outside the classroom, using facial expressions to convey meanings such as "the look" for reinforcing rules within a controlled environment, non-acceptance of students learning style such as students interrupting teacher during lessons, and ignoring behaviors that may prove to become disruptive and interfere with the learning environment, such as students crawling around during instruction time. The participants demonstrated limited knowledge on using their students' culture as a knowledge base (Nieto, 2000). Many of the classroom observations exhibited "nice" classrooms that did not represent the cultural diversity of the students or positive interactions between the teacher and student. These classroom observations of the teachers illustrated their enacted theory. The purpose of creating the professional

development workshops was to strengthen the link between the teachers' espoused theory and theory in use.

### **Transforming Teacher's Current Pedagogy**

I used the coded data from participants' espoused theory, theory in use, classroom observations, field notes, journals, and new themes from the study to construct meaningful professional development workshops that would transform the participants' pedagogical stance (See Table 4, Appendix A). The new themes included teaching styles, teaching materials, students categorized as learning the same way, fixed relationships between teacher and student, traditional classroom schedules and teaching styles.

### **Professional Development Content**

I utilized Beer et al.'s (1990) six-step change model to move systematically through the action research cycles. The six-step change model of Beer et al. focused on diagnosing the current situation, developing a vision for change, gaining commitment to the vision, developing an action plan, implementing change, and assessing and reinforcing change. I used this six-step model in my action research piece for promoting change.

The use of this six-step model began with the preliminary phase of the study, which I used to focus on diagnosing the current situation at Daniel Preschool. The current situation included teachers who demonstrated lack of culturally responsive practices. Through the interviews and classroom observations in Cycles I, II, III, and IV, I began developing a framework for a vision of change. The vision focused on fostering culturally responsive pedagogy in urban classrooms. The next step included gaining a commitment from the novice teachers along with observing their instructional practices. The analysis

of their responsive practices in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy helped establish an action plan in correlation to the professional development workshops. Once the professional development workshops were established, then participants began implementing necessary change. Finally, after each workshop the reinforcement of change took place post observations.

The intent of the professional development workshops was to help each participant transform their current pedagogical stance. The data collected from informal observations and the initial interviews were analyzed through the use of a theoretical lens to help implement this process. This process of reforming teachers' pedagogy and transformation occurred during varying times within the professional development workshops using materials to facilitate the discussion of culturally responsive pedagogy. I began establishing professional development by using my analysis of the preliminary phase and documentation of new knowledge gained from Cycle I, Cycle II, Cycle III, and Cycle IV. I utilized several scholars and their theories to discuss the severity of implementing multicultural education in low socioeconomic urban school districts. Several scholars link the use of marginalized student culture as a knowledge base for class instruction in early childhood rather than an obstacle for limiting student growth (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1998; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

### **Professional Development Workshop 1**

The professional development workshops were constructed as a result of the findings from the initial interviews and classroom observations. When three of the four participants sat down with me during the initial workshop I carefully contemplated how I

would facilitate. I wanted everyone to feel comfortable with speaking and being frank in front of the participants. Therefore, at each meeting I thought it would be wise to establish ground rules to help each person feel safe when talking. The responses from each participant were very similar regarding confidentiality and eliminating judgment. These ground rules set the standard for each interaction we would use over the next several weeks. In the first workshop I kept the workshop setting informal, while my presentation was formal. I sat among the participants as we discussed the topic of culture and race. The intent of the workshops was to help transform the participants' pedagogy so that it demonstrated Gay's (2002) culturally responsive teaching techniques: (a) comprehensive, (b) multidimensional, (c) empowerment, and (d) transformative. The intention was to break the ice among all the participants and establish a conversation about different types of culture. Therefore, the initial workshop began with a discussion on three books: *Visiting Day*, *Shelter in my Car*, and *Heather Has Two Moms*. The discussion focused on how the definition of family has changed from mom, dad, and grandmother, to grandmother serving as mother due to the father's incarceration. I utilized PowerPoint handouts for each workshop and thought it was important to discuss the topic of race, ethnicity, and dimensions of culture. If a teacher does not appreciate their students' culture, it is almost impossible to include their culture into instructional teaching. One of my agenda's, as a researcher, focused on helping participants review their own cultural beliefs so that they could broaden their cultural responsiveness to their students' cultures. Although some of the participants initially stated that they formally understood culturally responsive teaching, they did not fully integrate the concepts of Gay's (2002) perspectives into their classrooms. The initial slide from the power point

was probably the most beneficial for evoking conversation and encouraging the participants to begin to think of their views of race, dimensions of culture, and the importance for educators. Discussing culture helped facilitate the discussion of ensuring that all students were capable of learning to the best of their ability. This was essential for setting the foundational framework for implementing transformative techniques. As the researcher, I needed to establish the importance of culture and its impact on learning in early childhood, particularly within the urban preschool. The concepts of socialization, beliefs about culture, and inequality begin in early childhood and are reinforced throughout middle and high school (Hollins, 2011). This was the ideal time to help transform teachers' pedagogy so that they become more cognizant of their students culture and its impact. One teacher shared her thoughts regarding race as a result of the initial workshop, "Tell me if I'm wrong, but I have heard that there are only two races, Caucasoid and Mongoloid." The room fell silent as the teacher explained further what she thought about race. Another participant admitted that they had not heard of that concept regarding race. This was a breakthrough for me as a researcher understanding how a teacher's belief shaped their thinking and construction of pedagogy. I remember at the end of the workshop watching this particular teacher hastily grab her belongings and leave the library once I dismissed the session. The next day I was in my classroom preparing for a lesson and Ms. Kelly walked in, "I didn't fill out the workshop evaluation. Truthfully I don't think I'm right for this study." I had decided early on in this study that I would not pressure anyone to stay in the study who did not feel comfortable. My answer was calm and thoughtful as I assumed my leadership role. I asked her why she thought she was wrong for the study. "I just don't get it; I don't get culturally responsive

teaching. When I was going to school to become a teacher I was taught to just teach subject matter and nothing else.” I assured her that this was the reason why I selected her for the study and she agreed to come to the next workshop and try to understand culturally responsive pedagogy. I felt her frustration and decided that I would connect each future workshop to the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers. The New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers provided a clear vision of the knowledge, performances, and dispositions that teachers needed to support the learning called for in the Common Core State Standards and Core Curriculum Content Standards (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). By utilizing the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers to direct the workshops, it caused the materials and discussion to become more meaningful for participants. My preparation of the workshops was purposeful as the discussions, questions, and comments from the evaluations, as well as the classroom observations helped drive future workshops. After each workshop, 45 minute classroom observations were conducted for one week to determine if new ideas were implemented.

### **Professional Development Workshop 2**

The normal routine of the workshops required participants to arrive with their binders and address any concerns that they may have had from the last meeting. One of the essential parts of this workshop focused on how students’ worldviews helped shape their life experiences. The goal was to help the participants create a learning environment that respected the individual cultural differences. One of the participants felt that this particular workshop helped her understand diversity and the impact of instructional strategies. Participants were asked to review their own cultural beliefs, as well as write their own autobiography, which included life events related to education, family, and

religious tradition – victories as well as defeats. This assignment described Banks' (1994) philosophy that by writing your own autobiography helped build positive beliefs and attitudes that form the traditions and values of culture. Gay's (2000) theory of responsive teaching was also introduced to help participants examine other methods of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy. It was through this workshop that teachers began to make a connection with their students' background, social class, and race to help design culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and types of styles of diverse students to help make learning more efficient. It was during this workshop that participants were asked to think about who they were and then write their own autobiography that included their education, religious tradition, recreation, victories, and defeats. The intent of this assignment was to help the participants build and document personal beliefs so that they could connect how these events formed their traditions and cultural beliefs (Banks, 1994).

### **Professional Development Workshop 3**

Each workshop began with a discussion of the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers and how they connected to the planned goals, responses from the participants, and then a plan for our next discussion. This workshop focused on the journey of cultural responsiveness in education. I wanted the participants to gain a sense of understanding that change, particularly reforming one's pedagogy, is a process, much like a journey. The participants returned with their autobiographies and Mrs. Benet volunteered to read hers. I asked the participants to listen for the characteristics that may have shaped their colleagues cultural background particularly as it related to Gay's (2000) culturally responsive teaching techniques. Once she had finished several of the

participants pointed out that there were several characteristics that helped shaped her cultural background.

I remember my grandmother hanging pictures of all the children in the family who had graduated high school and most importantly college on her “Wall of Fame” as we would later call it. She was so excited explaining how each one, mostly she and her sister’s grandchildren, landed on that wall that she was so proud of. My grandmother graduated from Empire High in Empire in 1948 when Empire was a much different city. All the children in my generation and even the next generation now see themselves someday on that wall; it was something to look forward to. When people expect something from you, you work harder to achieve it. Sure, I’ve had stumbles along the way but, when someone expects great things from you, you just keep going.

The assignment proved most beneficial as it opened up discussion for creating an environment that empowered students through transformative teaching to encourage students to believe in their own success.

#### **Professional Development Workshop 4**

This workshop focused on the teachers identifying a student of different culture and background and then writing a biography. The assignment then asked participants to do a cross analysis of teacher and student by utilizing the participants’ autobiography and a student’s biography. The intended result was that participants would learn how to form a greater relationship with their students, becoming a culturally responsive educator. The purpose of this workshop was to help build teacher-student relationships through established respect and motivation during instruction. In order for teachers to change their view of their students, they had to first discover their students’ primary cultural role. Through building teacher-student relationships, it also helped enhance communication. Although, communication is more effective when teacher and student share the same cultural context it does not prohibit teachers from becoming successful this area (Hollins, 1993). This workshop helped teachers recognize flaws in their communication style such

as the lack of connection of home culture and school culture that impacted the use of Gay's (2002), comprehensive teaching technique. Teachers need to develop and then reinforce their communicative practices of their students' home culture (Hollins, 1993). The second part of the workshop focused on creating a culturally responsive classroom. The focus was to utilize Gay's (2002) concept of multidimensional techniques to foster culturally responsive teaching. Subsequently, classroom environment is an important factor for establishing culturally responsive pedagogy. Weinstein et al. (2003) describe the culturally responsive classroom as (a) creating a physical environment anchored around academic and social groups, which include student photos, teacher-student discussions, and student created bulletin boards; (b) establishing classroom chart for rules and expected behavior; (c) using consistent language styles comparable to students cultural backgrounds; (d) developing conscious classroom that acknowledges the students diversity; (e) establishing relationships with families to help provide academic achievement and direction; and (f) establishing interventions, such as rewards and praise that help redirect challenging behaviors. It was through this workshop that participants began to make some careful considerations of how to accommodate the diversity within their classrooms. One participant wrote, "I will think of different ways to incorporate the children's culture into my lessons." Hollins (1993) states that there are several competencies that help a teacher become successful with educating diverse populations: (a) communicating effectively with diverse learners; (b) knowing subject and students; (c) utilizing reflective teaching; (d) identifying culturally responsive resources; (e) creating supportive relationships between teacher and student, and between student and

student; (f) establishing relationship with parents to support student; and (g) promoting success in learning.

### **Professional Development Workshop 5**

This particular workshop focused on educators taking a stance through the use practicing culturally responsive teaching through classroom management. This particular workshop focused on educators actively incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy into their classrooms. The cultivation of honoring other cultures was illustrated through the following five essential elements of culturally responsive classroom management techniques: (a) recognizing one's own cultural lens and bias (Weinstein et al., 2003); (b) acknowledging a student's cultural background, such as learning styles and behavior (Sheets & Gay, 1996); (c) establishing awareness of broader, social, economic, and political context of school policies and practices that might discriminate against certain students causing inequality (Graybill, 2007); (d) willing using culturally appropriate management strategies to foster diversity (Weinstein et al., 2003); and (e) committing to creating a caring community by establishing positive relationships between teachers and student (Weinstein et al., 2003).

A culturally responsive classroom includes pedagogical approaches that guide the management decisions that teachers make. Weinstein et al. (2003) suggest that culturally responsive classroom management is an extension of culturally responsive teaching, which utilizes the background of a student's social experience. Although the participants were given journals to write their reflections and share at the workshops, no one had discussed the contents. Participants were asked to analyze their classrooms level of culturally responsiveness. The observation protocol focused on interactional style,

instructional strategies for cognitive styles and instructional design to cognitive responsiveness. The results of the survey demonstrated that most of the participants believed that their classrooms were currently making strides to make their classroom more culturally responsive. The teachers within the study were able to identify the areas in which they felt they were proficient and as well as the areas in need of improvement.

### **Professional Development Workshop 6**

The final workshop focused on supporting the change that the participants had made over the course of several weeks within their classrooms. I spent a considerable amount of time discussing the six-step change model of Beer et al. (1990) in this study. The change model was an important element for reinforcing ideas and strategies that I had previously introduced over the course of the study. On one of the PowerPoint slides during the workshop, I presented the six-step change model with reconstructed questions to address the needs of early childhood teachers. The basis of this workshop was to help teachers plan instruction based on students' needs through implementing culturally responsive techniques within the school curriculum. The outcome of this workshop was to help reinforce the intended change while impacting student success. The participants were asked to investigate their instructional practices and transform their current pedagogy to inform their behavior within the classroom. The participants' responses on supporting change relevant to fostering culturally responsive pedagogy were categorized under "never, sometimes, or always" (See Table 5, Appendix A). The table was utilized to analyze participants' level of change at the end of the study.

The fostering culturally responsive pedagogy "Supporting Change" slide included:

Diagnose the current situation – Does your current pedagogy address the needs of your students?

Developing a vision for change – Do you change your philosophy when the current classroom strategy is unsuccessful?

Gaining commitment to the vision – Do you have support in place to help you?

Developing an action plan – Do you utilize a set of steps to help establish change within the classroom during a certain timeframe?

Implementing Change – Do you utilize tools or strategies to help foster culturally responsive teaching?

Assessing & Reinforcing Change – Do you utilize strategies to help reinforce success of your pedagogy?

### **Transforming Current Pedagogy**

This section addressed the method of social change for transforming the participants' current pedagogy. I examined the results of the study based on multicultural education and culturally relevant theory previously discussed in the literature review. The participants in this study agreed that their current knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy was limited and that further concepts regarding integrating their students' culture needed further discussion. The teachers began to examine their own lens for understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. They understood that change was necessary as well as support. During the study I saw a shift in the participants' pedagogical stance, some through classroom observations and some through professional development workshops. The teachers' pedagogy began to link to their transformed classroom instruction. The observations helped inform the workshops especially towards

the end of the study, which challenged the participants to take a stance and support change for integrating their student's culture into their instructional lessons.

Beer et al.'s (1990) six-step change model helped facilitate the participants shift from "I know what culturally responsive pedagogy is" to "I don't know as much as I thought but will make changes to implement the practice." The participants' current teaching practices had shown them that there was "something missing" in their classrooms and that at times their attempts to include other cultures were demonstrated within the classroom environment but not directly embedded within their lessons. The participants realized that their lack of culturally responsive pedagogy unknowingly helped embrace racism within their classrooms.

Culturally relevant theory helped the participants to self-evaluate and question their current pedagogy. This type of questioning is similar to unloading and reloading a large box of books. For example, the teachers initially rejected that their previous knowledge was incorrect or needed to be "unloaded and then reloaded" with the correct information. However, classroom routines formulated within traditional teaching norms do not create an equitable learning environment that acknowledges cultural responsiveness as a means of educating culturally diverse students. During this study participants were asked in the middle of the study to assess the cultural competency of their classroom and this analysis looked at cultural classroom visuals, daily schedule, encouraging interpersonal interactions, understating of their students' cultural ways of thinking, acting and believing, interactional style, instructional strategies for cognitive styles, and instructional designs.

It was through professional development workshops and reflective practice that the participants had become informed of the integration of student culture within their daily lesson. The participants remained vigilant about the importance of their students excelling academically. Teachers were now mindful of how traditional teaching practices combined with district policy and mandated state standards excluded student culture from the curriculum. For some of the participants, they may have unknowingly excluded culture from teaching practices and focused exclusively on concepts and subject matter. In addition, some of the participants believed because of their students' age and grade level they would not comprehend or retain cultural concepts.

The context of public schools does not willingly incorporate student culture at the preschool level, hence they continue to embrace poor pedagogies that do not address cultural competencies and the impact it has on student success. One of the insights that I gained during this qualitative research study was that there is a gap in literature surrounding the discussion of culturally relevant theory in the context of early childhood and urban schools employing cultural responsive techniques geared towards reforming pedagogy in early childhood culture.

While there was not a significant change among participants within Gay's (2000) themes for establishing culturally relevant theory, the end result of the research demonstrated that Mrs. Benson, Ms. Duncan, and Ms. Kelly all illustrated transformative teaching. Mrs. Benson incorporated the student's culture into her topic of buildings by helping the students build a statue of city hall within their city. Ms. Duncan utilized pictures and screen savers of monuments within the students' neighborhood to discuss her topic on buildings and reinforce mathematical concepts. Ms. Kelly constructed a

Black History assembly for the entire school, which highlighted the cultural background of her students.

According to Noddings (1992), the participants' classrooms began transforming into a culturally responsive classroom, that demonstrated an educator who acknowledged and respected the cultural diversity of her students. It was during one of the professional development workshops that focused on the culturally responsive educator that participants began to evaluate their teaching methods as well as their classroom for incorporating a student's culture (Professional Development Workshop, February 22, 2012). The techniques from this particular workshop helped the teachers understand how children and adolescents develop and learn in a variety of school, family, and community contexts while providing opportunities to support their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). In addition, I discussed in the workshops students' beliefs and culture and then developed classroom activities to help them understand similarities and differences among students (Zion & Kozleski, 2005). This particular workshop was a major breakthrough for the participants in their understanding of components for becoming culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teaching is described as utilizing a set of strategies to help facilitate quality education to culturally diverse population of students (Green, 1964 as cited in Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). It was through these workshops that cultural relevant theory and theory in use began to take form. The participants' understanding about culturally responsive pedagogy became visible within their classrooms and interactions between students.

Among each participant there were experiences during their childhood that had a significant impact on their current beliefs and practices. The theme that connected these cases was that someone or something had influenced their desire to become a teacher, particularly in an urban school district. The participants had previously shared their espoused theory, and their theory in use emerged during the study. The study revealed the lack of understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, lack of implementation of it, as well as strategies for ameliorating the problem. Much of the observations illustrated lack of cultural relevant theory with responses from participants that often spoke of an increased need to relate to the Hispanic students and their parents although the study focused on African American students. Although the results of this study surpassed my boundaries of thinking with implementing strategies and integrating culture into the curriculum, it illuminated inequality in education. The four educators utilized the information from the workshops and established a variety of instructional techniques such as media, literature, technology, and assemblies to incorporate students' culture into lessons. The outcome of the study was positive for the educators, as they understood that they needed to integrate student culture more often into their lessons. The participants' formal knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy began to transform and then conform to cultural relevant theory. Not only did the participants' espoused theory change, which transformed their theory in use, but they became more culturally relevant within their classrooms and relational with their students with their new formal understanding. As a result of my research, the confidence of the students began to flourish as they experienced more of their culture at school.

The transformation of a teacher's current pedagogy consisted of obtaining multiple forms of data such as documenting classroom observations, interviewing participants, and utilizing data such as photographs to inform the rest of the study from Cycle I, II, and III. Through reflection, documenting field and journaling notes of concerns that stemmed during the study, the data were recorded for analysis of the action plan. In addition, the collection of classroom observations, photographs of cultural diversified artifacts of the students within the classrooms, and field notes were utilized in these cycles. Analyzing these action research cycles also included creating a plan of action based on the observation to help further establish professional development workshops to facilitate dialogue among participants and researcher regarding working with diverse populations of students.

### **Findings of Professional Development Workshops**

Throughout this study I took notice of the participants' demeanor as well as how they incorporated the workshops within their classroom. Because action research occurs in cycles it was important to create a plan to observe participants and then formulate workshops based on perceived need. It was during one of my observations that I began to recognize participants incorporating culturally responsive theories.

The participants were asked to keep a journal during the course of this study but it was not shared during the workshops. Therefore, I asked each participant to write a brief reflection on what they gleaned from the workshops and how their pedagogy was impacted from participating in this study. The teachers stated how they felt more comfortable with incorporating the student culture into the curriculum while being able to achieve the state and school districts standards. Mrs. Benson stated, "The workshops

have brought more ideas that will allow me to embed into my lessons and more sharing of students culture. I know I can be creative enough to allow more sharing of students' lives in the classroom" (Professional Development Workshop, March 7, 2012).

Some of the participants, such as Ms. Duncan and Mrs. Benet began utilizing reflective practices to critically think about their beliefs in ways that impacted their teaching.

Ms. Duncan described using reflective practices after enduring a rough day with one of her students who lacked interest in the lesson on buildings. She reflected on how to incorporate student culture into the lesson to make it more meaningful. Mrs. Benet also

began using reflective practices to engage her class on the topic of exercise by

introducing types of dances such as hip-hop, tap dance, and ballet. Knowles (1984)

describes self-reflection as essential for continuous learning. I learned that by the teachers

sharing more of their thoughts and experiences with other educators it helped gain

another perspective regarding instructional approaches to help transform their current

pedagogy. Adults should partner with other colleagues to collaborate and take

responsibility for their own learning (Knowles, 1984). Knowledge gained from the

workshops served as a reminder to guide their lesson planning and a reminder to consider

the culture of their students, families, and learning environment. I learned that by

encouraging teachers to use self-reflective practices, they were more apt to participate in

the change process in the near future.

## **Conclusion**

The observation protocol helped collect data to examine the learning environment

and teacher-student interactions confirmed by the collected data. I learned from the

analysis of the data that teachers within the study had distinct social, economic, and

cultural backgrounds, which established a foundation for their values and beliefs. These values and beliefs shaped their instructional strategies within their classroom. I also learned that although I could not change their values and beliefs about education, I played a major part in facilitating their transformation of current pedagogy through professional development workshops to mirror culturally relevant theory.

Among each participant there were experiences during their upbringing that had a significant impact on their current beliefs and practices. The theme which connected these cases was that someone or something had influenced their desire to become a teacher, particularly in an urban school district. The study revealed the lack of understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, lack of implementation of it, as well as strategies for ameliorating the problem. The results of this study exceeded my expectations regarding implementing strategies and integrating culture into the curriculum. The four participants utilized the information from the workshops and established a variety of instructional techniques such as media, literature, technology, and assemblies to incorporate student culture into lessons. The final results of the study yielded positive results for the educators as they understood that they needed to integrate students' culture more often into their lessons. As a result of my research, I note the positive change to the students' confidence as they experienced instructional lessons that included their culture in school.

**Participants' new formal understanding.** An analysis of the classroom environment and teacher and student relationships through the lens of culturally relevant theory positioned all the teachers as emerging with the utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy as an empowerment process. I utilized Gay's (2000) four themes to classify

each participant's new formal understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. The four themes included: 1) comprehensive, 2) multidimensional, 3) empowerment, and/or 4) transformative. In forming a knowledge base about the teachers, it was important to determine their level of formal knowledge. The analysis of data (See Table 6, Appendix A) is a post view of where the participants currently are within the study. The chart of data helped develop themes by analyzing interviews, observations, and professional development workshops. In addition, the data gathered helped develop and connect themes relevant to the literature. The patterns and links to data were essential for categorizing data and developing themes.

*Comprehensive.* Gay (2000) argues that part of a teacher facilitating culturally responsive teaching is focusing on the entire student, which includes social and emotional, cognitive as well as subject matter. The analysis of the data yielded that Ms. Duncan demonstrated comprehensive teaching in a proficient context. The teacher was very in tune to the needs of her students, which began with morning greetings and light conversation between her and the students. Ms. Duncan was observed during one of her lessons on buildings incorporating pictures and names of the students' neighborhood to help them connect with their community establishing a more meaningful experience. The other three participants, Mrs. Benet, Mrs. Benson, and Ms. Kelly lacked advantages in this area of comprehensive technique for culturally responsive teaching. They failed to concretely connect relationally with their students and their instructional tools were very abstract for an early childhood setting. Creating an environment based on caring and concern, where each student is valued, the effect is that students become motivated to learn (Stipek, 2002).

***Multidimensional.*** This strategy involves several items such as focusing on instructional content, learning context, classroom environment, student-teacher relationships, instructional strategies, and assessments of student performance (Gay, 2000). There is a small portion of the day devoted to whole group instructional learning. Whole group is the only time that the entire class is simultaneously learning collectively. Although, Mrs. Benet acknowledged that she could do more with incorporating student culture into the curriculum she demonstrated competency with utilizing various components for enhancing students learning experiences. Mrs. Benet displayed proficient multidimensional teaching through her use of expected verbal class rules, such as being kind to your friends, raising your hand if you have a question, and keeping your eyes on the teacher. Other examples of multidimensional teaching included cultural visuals on the wall such as posters of African American writers and their books as well as resources of instructional materials such as books, smart board technology, and ethnic artifacts such as rugs from Kente cloth displayed within her classroom. Kente cloth is a fabric made of silk and cotton introduced by West African countries. However, Mrs. Benson, Ms. Duncan, and Ms. Kelly did not demonstrate multidimensional instructional practices. They each demonstrated pieces of Gay's (2000) culturally relevant theory categories but tended to focus more on the district's curriculum, environment, instructional strategies, and assessment of student performance rather than the cultural aspects of their students.

***Empowerment.*** The empowerment approach of is essential for helping improve, encourage, and motivate students to believe in their own learning. In the review of the analysis of classroom observations, I asserted that this strategy was more evident among all of the participants. This strategy pushed and acknowledged student success in the

classroom. For instance, among the participants there were three teachers who facilitated empowerment among their students. For instance, Ms. Duncan utilized a phonics phone so that her students were able to hear the echo of their voice pronouncing letters. In addition, this teacher scaffolded lessons, particularly on rhyming words, when students demonstrated lack of knowledge. Examples of empowerment were also illustrated in Mrs. Benson's class lessons on the letter S and P. Students were asked to demonstrate knowledge of words that began with letter S and P, and the students who demonstrated difficulty were assisted by the teacher. Mrs. Benet utilized a consistent strategy for demonstrating empowerment by allowing students several chances until they reached the correct answer. Ms. Kelly's instructional technique of empowerment displayed teacher scaffolding as well as student to student support. According to Gay's (2000) analysis, on a culturally responsive rubric Ms. Kelly demonstrated the distinguished approach (See Appendix F). Her classroom was divided into several learning groups according to academic ability, which reinforced support for each student. This was the only category where all the participants identified with Gay's (2000) techniques for addressing empowerment within their classroom.

*Transformative.* Gay (2000) describes transformative as utilizing and respecting a student's cultural background while incorporating it into instructional lessons. This method demonstrates appreciation of student accomplishments and helps motivate them further in instruction. During the course of my research, I observed and found transformative the most meaningful strategy. The analysis of the data validated the importance of incorporating a student's cultural background into the classroom lessons. It was during my final visit and observation of Mrs. Benet's class that I began to experience

the students' excitement and how she demonstrated the distinguished transformative approach of Gay's (2000) cultural responsive model (See Appendix F). The students were studying literature and the teacher utilized the smart board technology to discuss various famous African Americans. The teacher then asked each student which book they previously read the day before. Each student answered with the name of a favorite book and character. Outside Mrs. Benet's classroom was also a bulletin board with students' own hand written name next to a picture of the book they read. The bulletin board illustrated the students' accomplishments and encouraged learning continuous reading (Gay, 2000). While Mrs. Benet did an excellent job of utilizing Gay's (2000) transformative technique, she was the only participant to demonstrate strong skills in this area.

The other three participants, Mrs. Benson, Ms. Duncan, and Ms. Kelly, did not demonstrate evidence of transformative examples during my classroom observations. Mrs. Benson described her lack of implementation of transformative techniques of the students' culture as the result of her students not being old enough to comprehend cultural ideas. Ms. Duncan's basic level illustrated her belief that she was transformative, but did not display or incorporate this technique into her lessons. Ms. Kelly, felt like the district curriculum was more focused on state standards rather than implementing student culture. Therefore, the district focus became Ms. Kelly's focus. This analysis of data was a development over time of where the participants' currently were within the study.

My descriptions and impression of Ms. Kelly evolved from the 12 observations during the course of the study between her and the students within the classroom. As I began to engage the participant more in professional development workshops,

Ms. Kelly's interactions with her students became more insightful. Ms. Kelly was emerging more in the context of empowerment. She began demonstrating approaches for helping improve, encourage, and motivate students to believe in their own learning. Ms. Kelly, who seemed during the inception of my research unsure if she was right for the study, made strives within her classroom following the professional development workshops. After a while, Ms. Kelly's classroom setting demonstrated recognition of the students' culture through the display of more African American books and some learning materials, but it was not always evident in the quality and nature of her interaction with the students. I utilized Gay's (2002) cultural model to classify Ms. Kelly's growth within the study. According to Gay (2002), Ms. Kelly made visible attempts to include all cultures but she did not empower her students to believe in their own learning.

Although Ms. Kelly was not very vocal about the learning environment within her class, there was a significant change in how she incorporated student culture. For instance, instead of displaying books on shelves relevant to her students' culture, she discussed the book prior to reading it. Afterwards the displayed books were accessible to the students for reading. In addition, Ms. Kelly incorporated the student culture through art activities, music, and certain months dedicated to students' culture. It was not until I sat down and went through her library books that I saw evidence of the students' culture within the learning environment. Each month Ms. Kelly created an author study that displayed several books and background information relevant to African American students' culture. In addition, she had the students write a few words on their favorite book from the study. Many of the students had not heard of African American children authors such as Donald Crews, Ezra Jack Keats, and Angela Johnson. This activity was

significant because it meant that previous research about the students' culture was needed to complete this activity and attention paid to student learning styles to make the lesson more relevant and meaningful to their lives.

It was during one of my observations that I saw a stronger relationship form between teacher and student. The teacher and student were working on a special project for Black History month and the students began to understand that it was about them, they began taking more ownership of the project. The students became more interested and focused on interacting with the teacher regarding the lessons. It was through this observation that I began to see a small change in how comprehensive strategies appeared. Although Ms. Kelly, according to Gay's (2000) categorization, was not fully comprehensive, she made small strides in the right direction of establishing cultural responsiveness. This was the first time that I began to recognize that Ms. Kelly had utilized a race-based intervention of critical race theory. Her special project was more race specific rather than race neutral compared to the culture of the students within her class. This was a significant milestone for the transformation of Ms. Kelly's pedagogy. From all of the observations that I had documented this was the most obvious display of cultural responsiveness of considering her students' culture rather than a broad spectrum of including other races into her lessons. Ms. Kelly had begun to utilize her students' culture as a knowledge base for class instruction rather than an obstacle growth (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1998; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

In addition, there was more of a representation of the students' culture through posters and pictures. Ms. Kelly began acknowledging and respecting the cultural

diversity of the students by incorporating elements into her instructional practices (Noddings, 1992). It was not until the very end of my study that I observed a transformation occur in Ms. Kelly. Since the participants did not share their journal entries throughout the study, they were asked at the end of the study to write a reflection regarding their expectations, perceptions, and feelings regarding their experiences both professionally and personally (Professional Development Workshop, March, 7, 2012). Ms. Kelly wrote, "I will make more of an effort to bring my students culture into all content areas and that I would like to make my class more multicultural while exposing children to other cultures in different subject areas." Ms. Kelly and four other teachers collaborated and presented a Black History program to the school. Fifteen of Ms. Kelly's students were responsible for the speaking part of the program. Each student was dressed as a famous African American, past and present, that made contributions to society such as Wilma Rudolph, Venus Williams, Rosa Parks, Phyllis Wheatley, Nelson Mandela, Thurgood Marshall, and President Barack Obama. Although this assembly did not include all of Gay's (2002) four techniques for including culturally responsive teaching, it did focus on transformative approaches, through the use of respecting and displaying a student's cultural background.

Mrs. Benson often permitted her students to share during the lesson their experiences during certain holidays. These types of techniques helped establish a positive learning environment. Students who shared their experiences felt included within the classroom and took more of an ownership of abiding by rules. In addition, Mrs. Benson took pride in parents who shared stories during arrival and dismissal time. This type of sharing information demonstrated a positive impact on the learning environment.

During one of the professional development workshops, Mrs. Benson stated that she believed that students in early childhood were too young to understand cultural lessons. However, during her lesson on buildings, I began to see the depth of her growth through the use of multidimensional teaching. On observation number nine, the teacher showed her students a picture of city hall in Empire, New Jersey. The students then having seen and recognized this building replicated the city hall building using milk cartons, black paint, and glue. The students also replicated their school building, Daniel Preschool. The teacher then went further and had the students learn one fact about a famous African American. These activities were also evident in her lesson plans. I reflected on my previous self-doubt of whether this study would make any impact. The study had accomplished what I had designed it to do. The teachers were receptive to my concepts regarding culturally responsive pedagogy, which was evident in not only lesson plans, but classroom observations. Each participant arrived at her own level of understanding but at different points during the study. For some of the participants, I observed that they had begun to use their students' culture as a framework to make teaching more relevant (Gay, 2000). The other participants utilized reformed instruction that helped students connect learning to their community, transformed their pedagogy to include multiple elements to integrate student culture, enabled their students to participate more, and helped students become independent learners (Gay, 2000).

**Vignette: Establishing Transformative Lessons.**

For several weeks teachers were observed informally to acquaint themselves with the researcher's style of observations. It was during the actual observations that the teacher had become more comfortable with being herself, particularly when I was in the

room. The teacher asked a student, which song they wanted to sing during class and the student answered “Hola Todos,” which translated as, “Hello everybody.” Gay (2002) asserts that “transformative” is one method of illustrating culturally responsive teaching. The teacher in this vignette was Ms. Duncan, who commented that being able to incorporate student culture into instructional lessons was very important for meeting the needs of all students in class. Although Ms. Duncan was not familiar with specific details of students whose backgrounds were different from hers, it did not keep her from incorporating their culture into the lesson. She utilized other teaching professionals who were more familiar with the students’ culture as a means of incorporating their belief systems into the classroom.

Ms. Duncan discussed her previous experiences working with African American and Hispanic students. Normally, Ms. Duncan was very direct with her students, expecting them to adhere to the classroom rules. During my classroom observations she often spoke with a firm tone that asserted her authority within the classroom. It was not often that I observed Ms. Duncan raising her voice at her students. Often she asked probing questions to get them to think of what they should be doing during instructional time. For instance, she reprimanded one student who was off task during a lesson, “What are you supposed to be doing, is that what you are supposed to be doing? No, so then why are you doing it and I expect an answer.” Ms. Duncan’s interaction with her students resembled a strong illustration of a mother figure. She often required and demonstrated the need for respect from her students. According to Jones-Thomas et al. (2004), Ms. Duncan’s values and experiences as an African American woman influenced her identity and way of functioning.

It was during my ninth visit to Ms. Duncan's classroom that I felt a direct connection between her, the students, and their community. Ms. Duncan's students did a study on buildings and she had real pictures of buildings from the students' neighborhoods. I knew that these were real buildings from the student's neighborhood because I grew up in the surrounding area of the school. It was during this observation of her instructional lesson that I identified more of Gay's (2002) transformative techniques. The teacher included the students' neighborhood into her lesson plans by writing the students a message on the message board. Early childhood teachers utilize a message board to write constructive messages to the students that are pertinent to the lesson, which helps students build on their knowledge of letter recognition and literacy. The teacher included the students' neighborhood into her lesson by writing the students a message on the message board. Students then are asked to come up to the board and select letters, words, or sentences that they recognize. The teacher used a marker to circle, draw a rectangle or triangle to identify the students' knowledge. The teacher's message read: "Good morning! Did you know that buildings come in different shapes and sizes? What Shapes do you see in buildings in Empire?"

It was during a post observation visit to Ms. Duncan's classroom that I felt her direct connection with the students and their community. Ms. Duncan's classroom environment had begun to change. I noticed that the job chart on the wall had actual pictures of the students within the classroom. She also had a handmade quilt with all of her students' and families' pictures. This is a great way for students to feel comfortable with their learning environment. I began to see more pictures of her students posted around the classroom and more representation of displays related to their neighborhood.

During my classroom observations I noticed that Ms. Duncan's setting further depicted screen savers on the class computers of city hall in Empire and the Cornell Johnson Bridge, which connects Empire, New Jersey and Johnsonville, Pennsylvania. This observation demonstrated Ms. Duncan's strong knowledge base of utilizing pictures of her students' neighborhood through screen savers on the students' computers (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1998; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

### **Vignette: Empowering Students**

The teacher described in this vignette, Mrs. Benet, a gentle, soft-spoken teacher, was very flexible in how she delivered instruction to her students. Several students demonstrated learning disabilities in the context of speech. The students began their instructional time with a circle song in which they sang in both English and Spanish. The next song, "I love you," was sung by students to their neighbor. Once the students finished singing the good morning song the researcher commented that she smelt something good. The teacher indicated that the students were going to make soup today. The teacher went around the classroom and asked each student what he or she was going to put in the soup. The teacher took time to give each student a chance to answer, particularly the students with speech impediments. The teacher corrected one student who offered a fruit instead of a vegetable telling him "try again." The student successfully stated his vegetable and smiled once he realized that he gave the correct answer. This observation demonstrated success through learning, but also helped build the student's self-esteem.

The classroom observations of teacher-student interaction of Mrs. Benet initially had not demonstrated many examples of culturally responsive pedagogy, but it was during my sixth visit to her classroom that I really begin to see the impact of my study in her instruction. During Mrs. Benet instructional time she asked the students which version of “Itsy Bitsy Spider” they wanted to do. The students yelled out “Let’s do the hip hop version.” As the researcher I was curious if this was actually the students’ idea so I asked, “Do you guys like hip hop?” The students yelled, “Yes.”

During another post observation of Mrs. Benet’s class she sang the song Bingo and inserted each student’s name within the song. The students’ expressions asserted that they enjoyed hearing their names called during the song. Mrs. Benet established a strong student centered classroom that utilized the student culture as a resource for instructional lessons. The significance of her method was to teach her students rhyming words by including their first names and adding letter “o” to the end. By Mrs. Benet adapting the Bingo song to make the lesson more relevant to her students, she demonstrated cultural responsiveness.

Through my observations of Mrs. Benet, it appeared that she had an ability to meet certain cultural competencies with her students through her use of communication. It was through one of my classroom observations that I observed Mrs. Benet giving a student a high five for giving the right answer to a question. When students and teachers share a common form of communicating whether through symbols or facial expressions, it helps facilitate learning within the classroom (Hollins, 1993). The teacher utilized Gay’s (2002) transformative as well as a comprehensive approach. The teacher transitioned into her large group (instructional time in early childhood classrooms). The

teacher asked the students what they learned yesterday and the students yelled out various names such as Rosa Parks, Barack Obama, Dr. King, and Michelle Obama. Then the teacher asked one of the students to come up and talk about Rosa Parks.

Teacher: “What happened to Rosa Parks?”

Student: “They want her to get out of her seat but she said no.”

Following this discussion, the teacher showed a clip of a book on the Smart Board titled, *If a Bus Could Talk*, which depicted a children’s story about Rosa Parks. The self-doubt that emerged during the beginning of the study was now completely diminished. This lesson demonstrated strong transformative techniques as well as empowerment.

Mrs. Benet challenged the institution’s format for incorporating the school’s curriculum.

### **Conclusion of Participant New Formal Knowledge**

The teachers within this study did not originate from the same social class as their students, and for some, from different cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, it was important to gain a perspective regarding the thoughts of teachers and their feelings of integrating students’ culture into the teaching environment. When the school culture mirrors that of the home environment, it appears that African American students thrive academically in school (Ladson-Billings, 2006). I assert that it is the same for all students such as Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students. The experiences of urban early childhood teachers who utilize culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom have demonstrated positive outcomes. These positive outcomes have notably increased students’ self-esteem, helped bridge the gap between school and parents, as well as enhance the classroom atmosphere.

It was not until the very end of my study that I observed a transformation of the teachers. I did notice that the techniques that teachers used were more geared towards the African American students. I began to see how culturally relevant theory had begun to take shape within the study through the transformation of the teachers' pedagogy. For instance, during my next visits after the professional development workshops there were more photographs of the students within the classroom, positive teacher-student interactions, and a culturally responsive classroom appropriate for early childhood students. Since the participants did not share their journal entries throughout the study, they were asked at the end of the study to write a reflection regarding their expectations, perceptions, and feelings regarding their experiences both professionally and personally (Professional Development Workshop, March, 7, 2012). Ms. Kelly wrote, "I will make more of an effort to bring my students' culture into all content areas and that I would like to make my class more multicultural while exposing children to other cultures in different subject areas." Ms. Kelly and four other teachers outside of the study collaborated and presented a Black History program. Fifteen of Ms. Kelly's students were responsible for the speaking part of the program. Each student was dressed as a famous African American, past and present that made contributions to society such as Wilma Rudolph, Venus Williams, Rosa Parks, Phyllis Wheatley, Nelson Mandela, Thurgood Marshall, and President Barack Obama.

The professional development workshops supported the transformation of the teachers' pedagogical stance and new formal understanding by engaging and restructuring their culturally responsive practices within the classroom (Danielewicz, 2001; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Palmer, 1998; Schön, 1983; Valli, 1992;

Zeichner & Liston 1996). This study utilized workshops as a way of engaging teachers and restructuring culturally responsive practices, which catered to adult learning to help diminish social injustices within the classroom.

Many of the teachers believed that teaching in an urban school contrasted significantly to suburban school districts. Students should be able to see and hear things in the classroom that relate to their culture. Teachers stated that the students' culture is an intricate piece of their identity and they should acknowledge it, and share it in the classroom so that the rest of the class can experience the various cultures.

It is critical that the students encounter their culture in the classroom, especially within an urban district. This is especially important for early childhood students who may not have opportunities for exposure to different cultures. Integrating student culture into the curriculum posed an important question for the participants. What types of outcomes would evolve if schools recognized student culture daily? (Tyson, 2003). Although teachers stated that they initially embraced integrating their students' culture into the classroom, the observations demonstrated a more focused district curriculum. The district curriculum unknowingly reinforced the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy through lack of integration of the students' culture into the curriculum. Bell (1992) explored how laws and institutions embraced racism. Institutions such as schools knowingly reinforce racism sometimes intentionally and other times unknowingly (Bell, 1992).

I found that after the study ended participants still invited me to visit their classrooms as testimony of how they had begun to critically incorporate culturally responsive techniques within their classroom. Some of the participants received the

challenge of participating in their schools first cultural diversity event that focused on encouraging the students to recognize and appreciate different cultures. The hallways, teacher lesson plans, classroom management styles, and pedagogical practices at Daniel Preschool have changed greatly as the participants and the school community has really taken on the task of including culture within the curriculum. Participants had begun to incorporate culturally responsive techniques into their current pedagogy while decreasing the disciplinary problems.

Through documentation of these classroom observations, I contemplated why Empire School district would mandate a curriculum that did not utilize the students' culture as framework for facilitating instructional teaching with an urban setting. As the researcher, I knew why the participants were not implementing the students' culture based on the district's outline of the curriculum. However, this study was a response to how I could help transform four participants' pedagogical stance through action research.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions & Implications

*If you don't like the way the world is you change it. You have an obligation to change it.*

*You just do it one step at a time.*— Marian Wright Edelman

This chapter is about imparting knowledge gained from the study, but more importantly, about becoming a pioneer for disadvantaged students in urban school districts. The reality is that minority students will dominate public schools particularly in disadvantaged urban school districts. By 2050, the Department of Commerce suggests that 57 percent of the student body in public schools within the United States will be composed of African American, Asian, and Hispanic students. Therefore, educators within these districts must recognize that their students will vary economically, racially, and culturally. Teachers will most likely encounter students whose background, culture, and social class are unlike their own (Gay & Howard, 2000). This research is essential for educators who currently teach in urban schools, but particularly for the next generation of educators who will enter the classroom for the very first time. Educational institutions, such as public schools, colleges, and teacher preparations programs in the United States, must designate culturally responsive teaching as a priority by establishing and evaluating policies, guidelines, best practices, and methodologies to foster culturally responsive teaching within schools.

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore the teaching practices, beliefs, and pedagogy of four early childhood teachers within an urban school. By researching and studying this topic, I was able to enhance the formal understanding of the participants by establishing a more culturally responsive environment within Daniel Preschool. The data that I collected from the study demonstrated incongruence among the teachers' espoused theory and theory of culturally responsive pedagogy. The research goal of the study was to explore the teaching practices, beliefs, and pedagogy of four urban early childhood teachers and how they connect daily instruction to their students' culture and ethnic background. In addition, the study sought to create a consciousness of student culture and establish methodologies among teachers for establishing culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms that represent African American students. The study suggested that most teachers lacked cultural approaches in regards to their African American students. The study demonstrated that the use of cultural responsiveness in urban classrooms proved to be a valuable approach for distributing district curriculum among African American students. Information regarding culturally responsive teaching was disseminated through teacher interaction and professional development workshops that offered modeling of approaches. For example, based on the classroom observations, the participants' lessons were not relevant to their students' cultural background. However, during the course of the professional development workshops, teachers were able to demonstrate a stance on multicultural education while connecting their students on a much higher level. Analyzing the data from the initial interview, classroom observations, and professional development workshops confirmed that the participants' espoused theory was much different from their theory in use.

The findings from this study indicated that the participants' formal understandings of cultural competencies were very similar to pre-service teachers because of their limited knowledge and cultural teaching approaches with their students. The initial results of the findings during Cycle II, indicated that the teachers had not taken a stance on their role in fostering culturally responsive pedagogy. The data indicated that teachers did not immediately consider their classroom environment and relationship with their students as a means of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study was the participants' pedagogical stance in implementing cultural responsive approaches in their classrooms. The study was successful based on the collected data that initially identified the participants' formal understanding of cultural responsive pedagogy and then implemented instructional approaches for fully integrating their students' culture into their lessons. Strong evidence of implementing culturally responsive approaches was found during classroom observations midway through the study coupled with the professional development workshops. The teachers needed to engage in workshops that directed and demonstrated the effectiveness of culturally relevant theory as a means for implementing multicultural education for a more equitable classroom environment.

### **Research Achievement**

The implications regarding my theoretical framework allowed incongruence to surface with the participant's espoused theory versus theory in use. The theoretical framework in this study utilized a concept map to illustrate the transformation of early childhood teacher's pedagogy in an urban school (See Appendix G). The concept map helped identify the participants' espoused theory, an active teaching stance, but the theory

in use displayed an enacted teaching stance. The research achieved indicated that a researcher can transform teachers' pedagogical stance without necessarily changing their beliefs and values. This qualitative action research achieved its goals primarily during Cycle I and Cycle IV. Participants arrived at their state of cultural consciousness and what inequalities existed within their own classroom prior to this study. While the participants achieved a level of understanding regarding their own consciousness of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy, by the end of the study they had positioned their thinking by taking a stance to integrate student culture into the curriculum. The study introduced several purposeful research questions that examined teacher beliefs, values, understanding, and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. The intent was to explore each teacher's current pedagogy and how it facilitated the learning of culturally diverse students. I utilized case study research to form a knowledge base of the participants' pedagogical beliefs. Through documenting the participants' formal understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy, I was able to transform teachers' pedagogical stance through professional development. The larger goal of the study was to ensure that the students' culture was being implemented within the curriculum and during instructional class time through the use of professional development workshops.

The study looked at the results of educators who experienced positive feedback from students when culturally responsive pedagogy was utilized within their classroom. The professional development workshops, that had participants complete a biography on one student, yielded positive results, as they came to learn about their student. The data collected from the classroom observations after professional development workshops

demonstrated that participants were able to integrate their students' culture into the curriculum. When participants learned more about their students' interests and home environment, the teachers were able to identify more refined methods of connecting students' culture to the curriculum. This section correlated to the literature overview relevant to social inequality of minorities in the United States, particularly the exclusions of culture and diversity classes within teacher preparation programs (Ardila-Rey, 2008).

The following research questions guided collections of data, analysis and completion of the study:

What role does culture play in teaching in urban classrooms for the teachers at Daniel Preschool? (See Table 7, Appendix A)

1. How do teachers at Daniel Preschool feel about integrating their student's culture into the teaching environment within an urban preschool? (See Table 8, Appendix A)
2. What are early childhood teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching in an urban classroom? (See Table 9, Appendix A)
3. How do the teachers draw upon African American students' culture/experience in their approach to teaching? (See Table 10, Appendix A)
4. In what ways are teachers at Daniel Preschool transforming their current pedagogy? (See Table 11, Appendix A)

The issue of inequality has taken many forms. In 1935, inequality was evident in the segregation of students based on race. In 1985, inequality was reflected in the court rulings of *Abbott v. Burke*. In 2001, The No Child Left Behind Act deliberately excluded

cultural pedagogy. Finally, in 2012, inequality was reflected at Daniel Preschool with the lack of integration of student culture. Through the examination of each teacher's current pedagogy and priorities, this study disclosed the teachers' current level of comprehension about integrating culture into their lessons.

### **Teacher Perceptions**

Teachers' perceptions within these case studies were positioned in the context of an urban school setting within a district that has continued to struggle with meeting annual performance objectives. For some students at Daniel Preschool, this was their first encounter with an educational setting. Therefore, teachers' concept and perception regarding utilizing cultural dynamics of their students was most beneficial to their learning.

Although the participants at Daniel Preschool maintained high quality standards for excellence, they often overlooked the need for cultural references within lessons. The participants of the study realized that state standards were necessary for growth but connecting their students' culture and school was also essential for bridging both worlds together. The analysis of the data demonstrated that while Mrs. Benson, Ms. Benet, Ms. Duncan, and Ms. Kelly believed that they were knowledgeable about the preschool environment, they needed to build a knowledge base of their students' cultural background through relationships.

### **Examination of Theory**

This section focuses on social change and the process of how the study evolved. I examined the results of the study based on multicultural education and culturally relevant theory. The participants in this study agreed that their current knowledge of culturally

responsive pedagogy was limited and that further concepts regarding integrating their students' culture needed further discussion. The teachers began to examine their own lens for understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. They understood that change was necessary with strong educational support. Beer et al.'s (1990) six-step change model helped facilitate the participants' shift from "I know what culturally responsive pedagogy is" to "I don't know as much as I thought but will make changes to implement the practice." The participants' current teaching practices had shown them that there was "something missing" in their classrooms, and that at times their attempts to include other cultures were demonstrated within the classroom environment but not directly embedded within their lessons. The participants realized that their lack of culturally responsive pedagogy unknowingly created an inequitable learning environment.

Culturally relevant theory helped me explore the participants' instructional methods by observing their classroom learning environment and teacher student interaction. Through this process it also allowed participants to self-evaluate and question their current pedagogy. This type of questioning is similar to unloading and reloading a large box of books. The teachers initially rejected that their previous knowledge was faulty or needed to be "unloaded and then reloaded" with the correct information. However, classroom routines formulated within traditional teaching norms do not create an equitable learning environment that acknowledges cultural responsiveness as a means of educating culturally diverse students. During Cycle IV of the study, participants were asked to assess the cultural competency of their classroom. This analysis looked at cultural classroom visuals, daily schedules, and encouraging interpersonal interactions. In addition, participants accessed their knowledge of their students' cultural ways of

thinking, acting and believing, interactional style, instructional strategies for cognitive styles, and instructional designs.

It was through professional development workshops and reflective practice that the participants had become informed of the integration of student culture within their daily lesson. The participants remained vigilant about the importance of their students excelling academically. Teachers were now mindful of how traditional teaching practices combined with district policy and mandated state standards excluded student culture from the curriculum. For some of the participants, they excluded culture from teaching practices and focused exclusively on concepts and subject matter. In addition, some of the participants believed because of their students' age and grade level they would not comprehend or retain cultural concepts. The context of public schools does not willingly incorporate student culture at the preschool level, hence they continue to embrace institutional racism and the impact it has on student success.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The nature of culturally responsive pedagogy is used to help facilitate quality education to culturally diverse populations of students (Green, 1964 as cited in Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that culturally responsive pedagogy began linking itself to the academic concerns of minority students (Martin, 1997). The results of this study add to the body of knowledge by examining teacher beliefs, espoused theory, theory in use, and the outcome of implementing student culture into the classroom setting. In regards to preschool, most literature on culturally responsive pedagogy is centered on grades from elementary to high school. More studies that focus on integrating students' culture are needed in preschool. This study examines

four teachers' prior knowledge base of fostering culturally responsive pedagogy and the actual integration of student culture into their classrooms. The participants agreed that more discussion is needed about early childhood instruction regarding the integration of African American student culture. Although these teachers were modestly aware of culturally responsive pedagogy, they were not knowledgeable. Therefore, the findings from the study supported my earlier argument for the significance of the study, which illustrated the need for teachers to effectively incorporate diversity into lessons refraining from prejudicial behavior based on social class, race, or ethnicity (Montgomery, 2001). There is a major difference in demonstrating practical knowledge on diversity versus an actual effective pedagogy.

This study focused primarily on teacher interview responses, classroom observations, and input from professional development workshops. There were other implications for future research, which could have included early childhood students' consciousness of their teachers and classroom environment. For example, how teachers use language and tone in the classroom could have a direct impact on the motivation and success of their students (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008). Future research is needed that focuses on how fostering culturally responsive pedagogy within early childhood urban classrooms from Pre-K to Kindergarten impacts self-esteem and student achievement in first grade. More research is needed because the role of teachers has changed dramatically over the years as teachers are often looked at as mentors, role models, and social workers particularly in urbanized school districts (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). This dramatic change is a reflection of the cultural diversity of students in urban schools and their environmental experiences. The influx of change causes teachers to face

multiple challenges in urban schools today where the traditional image of the teacher is no longer applicable (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). Other implications for future research include a case study comparison of several early childhood students within an urban school setting, whose teacher integrates their culture into the curriculum versus several urban early childhood students whose teacher does not include culture into their pedagogical practices and the impact on student achievement. Future research is needed to examine teacher preparation programs' integration of culturally diversity courses particularly colleges within urban areas.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Over the past several years much more information has become available on improving teacher preparation programs. Studies of improving teacher preparation programs show the urgency for impacting student academic achievement (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). According to a study by Erskine-Cullen and Sinclair (1996), teachers reported a strong belief that the best preparation for teaching in an urban school was to have a practicum in an urban school where teachers could get a real feel for the school as well as the class. Some of the participants from the study believed that improving teacher preparation programs first began with higher education institutions. University instructors need to have knowledge and respect for the realities of current students in urban area schools and communities, with acknowledgement by the university community (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996).

The policy issue of reforming teacher preparation programs needs an accountability process to review programs within higher education institutions. Program accountability must focus exclusively on the factors that improve instruction, and state

accountability for teacher preparation should be built on a set of clear signals about program quality (Crowe, 2010). Nationally, disadvantaged students demonstrate disparities in their education, evident in their graduation rates and success of college attendance (Education Week, 2011). Despite the efforts of the No Child Left Behind policy a revision to this policy needs to be implemented to give urbanized students the necessary tools to be academically effective. There are some major pedagogical problems with NCLB and some very daunting negative effects, especially for urban and other poor schools, communities and student populations (Gay, 2007). According to this policy, it is expensive and time consuming to fund high quality teachers and higher education institutions need more funding to train pre-service teachers to work with ethnically racially and culturally diverse students (Gay, 2007). Although President Barack Obama has a teacher quality partnership grant program that teams up with institutions of higher education, its main goal is to recruit individuals from other occupations into the teaching force rather than reform current teacher preparation programs.

The implication for reform includes addressing all policy makers and all stakeholders such as educators and administrators and revamping the nation's teacher preparation programs within all institutions of higher education, particularly within New Jersey. If the nation lacks resources and funds needed for reforming teacher preparation programs, then other alternatives would be implemented at a later time. The current executive order issued by President Obama would serve as the executive decision concluding with implementing the decision through enacted laws for all higher education institutions.

Unlike Ladson-Billings (2009a), my strategy for reform does not include recruiting only teachers who have a desire to work with African American students. However, the plan includes policy reform that includes establishing a diffusion of policies by adapting ideas from other policy domains such as examining organizations committed to improving the preparation of teachers for cultural diversity. Organizations such as UNITE, which is the Urban Network to Improve Teacher Education, joined nine other universities to develop teacher preparation curriculums that include cultural diversity. These universities include Central Connecticut State University, Indiana State University, University of Louisville, University of Miami, Ohio State University, Simon Fraser University, Teachers College-Columbia University, College of Tennessee and the University of Toronto (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). According to Anderson (2011) this process is described as formulating a policy. This policy would include a combination of South Carolina's Department of Education (2006) policy guidelines and some of Ladson-Billings (2009a) suggestions for reforming teacher preparation programs, together promoting a five step policy guideline for teacher preparation programs for all higher education institutions within the United States. On a state level, the recommendation for policy solutions includes mobilizing the reformed plan by gaining support from New Jersey's commissioner of education and governor, Union President of NJEA, Accreditation Agency, New Jersey State Board for Educators, State Senators as well as Assembly Speakers who are also the actors within this political environment in education. The strategic category adapted from South Carolina Department of Education (2011) for reforming teacher preparation programs worldwide includes: candidates first passing all state exams as well as completing a cultural bias

survey, with an interview from the members of the institutions faculty; spending time in field experiences within the university and current school district, providing educational experience that help teachers understand the central role of culture; conducting student teaching over a longer period of time in a more controlled environment; and establishing an extensive review process of the policy process each year using state officials to oversee the process, which Roberts and King (1991) identify as the administrative process and executive activities.

While the previous research and policies are active in their respective states, New Jersey currently does not possess similar policies for higher education teacher preparation programs. In addition, policies should be established that work to educate current teachers, such as the educators at Daniel Preschool, who may have obtained their teaching certificate through an alternate route program or a non-traditional method.

### **Conclusion**

Social inequality is evident in policies, teacher preparation programs, and public schools where culture is vaguely mentioned. One way to exhibit consistency among higher education institutions is to establish one basic teacher preparation policy, which requires the federal government to make adjustments in their accountability and requirements of teacher preparation programs. By enacting this proposed policy for teacher preparation programs on a federal level, it could help mandate the department of education of each state to adopt and implement cultural competency standards in teacher preparation programs on local levels within higher education institutions.

Teachers should be interested in linking the home environment to classroom practices so that student-teacher interactions are meaningful as well as significant in

impacting student success. The teachers, as a result of this study, I believe have made definitive strides in cultural references and continue to explore fostering culturally responsive pedagogy within their classroom practices. Although I was satisfied with the progress of the study, I understand that permanent change can only sustain itself through monitoring and refining instructional approaches. This exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy is critical for all teachers who differ culturally from their students, but understand that it is necessary for the rights and academic growth of the students.

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## Appendix A

### Tables

Table 1

*Participant Profile Sheet*

Names	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
Level of education	B.A	M.S./M.Ed.	M.S/M.Ed.	M.Ed.
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	45-55	45-55	26-30	29-36
Ethnic Background	Caucasian	Caucasian	African American	African American
Licensure/Certification	K-8	K-8	P-3 Cert.	P-3 Cert.
Years at current school	2	1	2	2
Grade currently taught	Kindergarten	Pre-K	Pre-K	Pre-K
Resident and currently teaching in same city				X

Table 2

*Dimension II: Social Relations*

Culturally Relevant Teachers	Assimilationist Teachers
Teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community.	Teacher-student relationship is fixed, tends to be hierarchical and limited to formal classroom roles
Teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students.	Teacher demonstrates connections with individual students.
Teacher encourages a “community of learners.”	Teacher encourages competitive achievement.
Teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other.	Teacher encourages students to learn individually, in isolation.

Note: From *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, (p. 34), by G. Ladson-Billings, 1994, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2009 by the John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Table 3

*Culturally Relevant Theory Beginning of Research*

Data Analysis	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
Comprehensive			X	
Multidimensional				X
Empowerment	X	X	X	X
Transformative				X

Table 4

*Data Codes & Themes*

Data Analysis	Code	Themes
Interview Classroom Observations	Pedagogy	Teaching styles Traditional teaching
Interview Classroom Observations	Classroom Management	Teaching materials Traditional class schedule
Classroom Observations	Relationships	Fixed teacher-student relationships
Interview Classroom Observations	Perspectives	Students categorized as learning the same way
Interview Classroom Observations	Beliefs	Teaching is practical

Table 5

*Supporting Change*

Professional Development Data Analysis	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
Current pedagogy addresses the needs of all students	Always	Always	Sometimes	Always
Philosophy of change	Always	Always	Always	Always
Current classroom support	Sometimes	Sometimes		Sometimes
Established change model	Always	Always	Always	Always
Available tools for fostering culturally responsive pedagogy	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes	Always
Present positive reinforcement strategies	Always	Always	Sometimes	Always

Table 6

*Culturally Relevant Theory End of Research*

Tools of Analysis	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
Comprehensive			X	
Multidimensional				X
Empowerment	X	X	X	X
Transformative	X	X	X	X

Table 7

*Participant Responses to Research Question 1*

Name	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
1. What role does culture play in teaching in urban classrooms for the teachers at Daniel Preschool?	Children should be exposed not only to their own culture but to cultures of various ethnic groups.	Student's culture is very important and should be acknowledged, shared and experienced.	It is critical that children encounter bits and piece of their culture in the classroom setting.	I believe that it has a positive impact on students' self-esteem.

Table 8

*Participant Responses to Research Question 2*

Name	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
<p>2. How do teachers at Daniel Preschool feel about integrating their students' culture into the teaching environment within an urban preschool classroom?</p>	<p>Teachers focus on children being able to see and hear things in the classroom that they can relate to.</p>	<p>Teachers embrace student's dress, food, holidays, language and customs.</p>	<p>Education must include cultural teaching and learning styles because urban and suburban districts greatly contrast.</p>	<p>I believe that it is necessary and I make an effort to do so regularly.</p>

Table 9

*Participant Responses to Research Question 3*

Name	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
3. What are early childhood teachers' formal understandings regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching in an urban classroom?	It is a rewarding experience when there is a positive impact on children and their families from culturally responsive teaching.	Through holidays, reading certain books and references from parents.	I incorporate more Latino experiences into the classroom such as music, language and dancing.	I believe that some educators are unsure of what it means to use culturally responsive teaching methods.

Table 10

*Participant Responses to Research Question 4*

Name	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
4. How do the teachers draw upon African American students' culture/experiences in their approach to teaching?	In my classroom I display and read books that relate to my children's culture.	We turned a fake spruce tree where the kids learned about evergreens and needles into a family tree with pictures of their families and they were proud to stand up and identify their family members.	We use Spanish music, Latin dance songs and language (greeting or conversations with the Hispanic children and their families in Spanish.	I find that I need to make a conscious effort to incorporate other cultures in my teaching methods.

Table 11

*Participant Responses to Research Question 5*

Name	Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Ms. Duncan	Mrs. Benet
5. In what ways are teachers at Daniel Preschool transforming their current pedagogy?	We celebrate holidays and months that honor various cultures.	Students are encouraged to bring stories and treasures to class such as family members.	I need to work on the Hispanic population in my classroom. My upbringing is similar to the African American children in the class and I find it easier to incorporate.	I use literature and the classroom environment primarily to integrate students' culture into teaching methods.

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form: Participation in Study

I agree to participate in a study entitled "Fostering Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in an Urban School," which is being conducted by Denise Jones of the Educational Leadership Department, Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to interview as well as observe how teacher instruction/culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom management reflects the dominant culture of students within their classroom. The data collected in this study will be combined with data from previous studies/research done by student and will be submitted for publication in a scholarly paper.

I understand that I will be required to help to solve a logic problem. My initials constitute my agreement and participation with different parts of the study:

Classroom Observations\_\_\_\_\_

Interviews\_\_\_\_\_

Participation in professional development workshops\_\_\_\_\_

Submission of lesson plans, classroom newsletters and classroom notices to parents\_\_\_\_\_

Digital photographs of classroom, class projects and bulletin boards\_\_\_\_\_

My participation in the study should not exceed the ten month school calendar year. I will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire and background information. Completing

the initial questionnaire and signing the consent form implies that I have agreed to participate in the study which will take place during the 10 month period of the school calendar year.

I understand that my responses will be confidential and that all the data gathered will be stored on a password protected computer and locked in a cabinet of the residence of the investigator. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used. My participation in this study is voluntary. This means that my decision to participate or not participate will not affect my job security.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. There is no compensation for participating in this study. A thank you note and incentives will be given out over the course of the study. I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

The researcher and principal investigator's name is Denise Jones and may be contacted via phone at 609-506-2202 or email at [jonesd61@students.rowan.edu](mailto:jonesd61@students.rowan.edu). The researcher and principal investigator's advisor is Dr. Susan Browne, 856-256-4500 Ext. 3830, Fax: 856-256-4918.

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(Signature of Participant) (Date)

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(Signature of Investigator) (Date)

I have read the above information. I have received information to answer any questions that I have. I agree that I am 18 years or older

## Appendix C

### Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Study Questionnaire

#### Participant Selection Criteria

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the form and return to teacher mailbox inside of sealed yellow envelope no later than September 19, 2011.

Please circle your level of education.      BA      MS/M.Ed      Doctorate

Ethnic Background     African American     Hispanic     Caucasian     Asian   

Other

Male     Female

4. K-12: Licensure/Certification:

Years at current school:

How many years have you taught in education in an urban school district?

Describe prior knowledge of teaching African American students in urban school districts.

How has your pedagogy changed for the current population of students that you teach?

Is there cultural sensitivity towards diversity within your school? (I.e. gender, diversity, special needs children, and non-English language learners). In other words, regarding the

issues that surround the concept of diversity, what do the people in your school value?

What do they believe? In addition, how do these values and beliefs shape your behavior?

What do you value as an educator?

What do you believe as an educator in relationship to your students?

## **Appendix D**

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Study Interview Questions**

“Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

What do you as an educator perceive to be culturally responsive pedagogy?

Do you have a personal philosophy or pedagogy for working with your current students?

What are your experiences with the student when you utilize culturally responsive pedagogy within the classroom?

How do your personal values help navigate your current position as a teacher?

What is your classroom experience working in urban school classrooms? Do you relate to the students? If so what are your strategies for teaching your students?

How do you connect with your students who may come from a different culture/social class then you?

How do you manage to incorporate the culture of your students into your curriculum?

How do you handle discipline? Are there special things that teachers of African American students should know about discipline?

Are you a product of the community that you teach? If not how did you get to know your students' culture?

If you could revamp early childhood education so that teachers would be more effective with African American students, what changes would you make?

## Appendix E

### Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Study Observation Protocol

#### A. Background Information

1. Observer:
2. Program: Educational Leadership Program
3. Date of Observation:
4. Length of Observation:
5. Was the teacher informed about this observation prior to the visit with written consent?  
Yes No

#### B. Participant #1

1. Name:
2. School:
3. Gender: Male Female
4. K-12: Licensure/Certification:
5. Did the teacher have their teaching philosophy/pedagogy displayed within the classroom? No
6. Years of teaching experience: 1-5 years 5-10 years 10-15 years 15 or more

#### C. Classroom Demographics

1. What is the total number of students in the class at the time of the observation?  
15 or fewer 21-25  
16-20 26-30

2. What is ethnic /gender of each student?
3. Was a paraprofessional or teaching assistant in the class?
4. Subject Observed/Descriptive Course Title:
5. Purpose (Objectives of lesson) the purpose of the lesson is to help students understand positional words.
6. Is the teacher's lesson plans visually displayed, if so are the plans reflective of the dominant culture within the classroom?
7. Materials used (teacher made, manufactured, district or department-developed) Do the materials represent the culture reflective within the classroom?
8. Student assessment for this particular lesson:

D. Teacher-Student Initiated Interactions Nature & Quality

Observation Notes	Analysis of Notes

E. Classroom Setting

Observation Notes	Analysis of Notes

Observation tool adapted from “Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design,” by J. Creswell,

2007, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

## Appendix F

### Culturally Responsive Rubric

Comprehensive	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
	No evidence of culturally responsive teaching.	Teacher facilitates culturally responsive teaching but demonstrates no evidence of including the entire student.	Teacher demonstrates culturally responsive pedagogy but excludes one of the three factors of the entire student/subject matter.	Teacher facilitates culturally responsive teaching on the entire student which includes social and emotional, cognitive as well as subject matter.
Participants		Mrs. Benet Mrs. Benson Ms. Kelly	Ms. Duncan	
Multidimensional	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
	The teacher focuses only on curriculum	Teacher focuses on classroom environment, instructional strategies and assessment of student performance.	Teacher focuses on instructional content, learning context, classroom environment and instructional strategies.	Teacher focuses on instructional content, learning context, classroom environment, student teacher relationships, instructional strategies, and assessments of student performance.
Participants		Mrs. Benson Ms. Duncan Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benet	
Empowerment	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
	Teacher hinders students by only displaying negative	Teacher utilizes approach to improve students to believe in	Teacher utilizes this approach to improve and encourage students to	Teacher utilizes this approach to improve, encourage, and motivate students to

	feedback.	their own learning.	believe in their own learning.	believe in their own learning.
Participants				Mrs. Benson Mrs. Benet Ms. Duncan Ms. Kelly
Transformative	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
Participants		Ms. Duncan Ms. Kelly	Mrs. Benson	Mrs. Benet
	Teacher does not incorporate student's cultural background into instructional lessons.	Teacher respects student's cultural background but uses little of student's culture in instructional lessons.	Teacher respects student's cultural background with visual displays but incorporates minimal facts into instructional lessons.	Teacher utilizes and respects student's cultural background while incorporating it into instructional lessons.

Information for rubric adapted from “Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, research, and practice.” by G. Gay, 2000, New York: Teachers College Press, and Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching by C. Danielson, 1996, Alexandria, VA: ASCD

# Appendix G

## Concept Map

